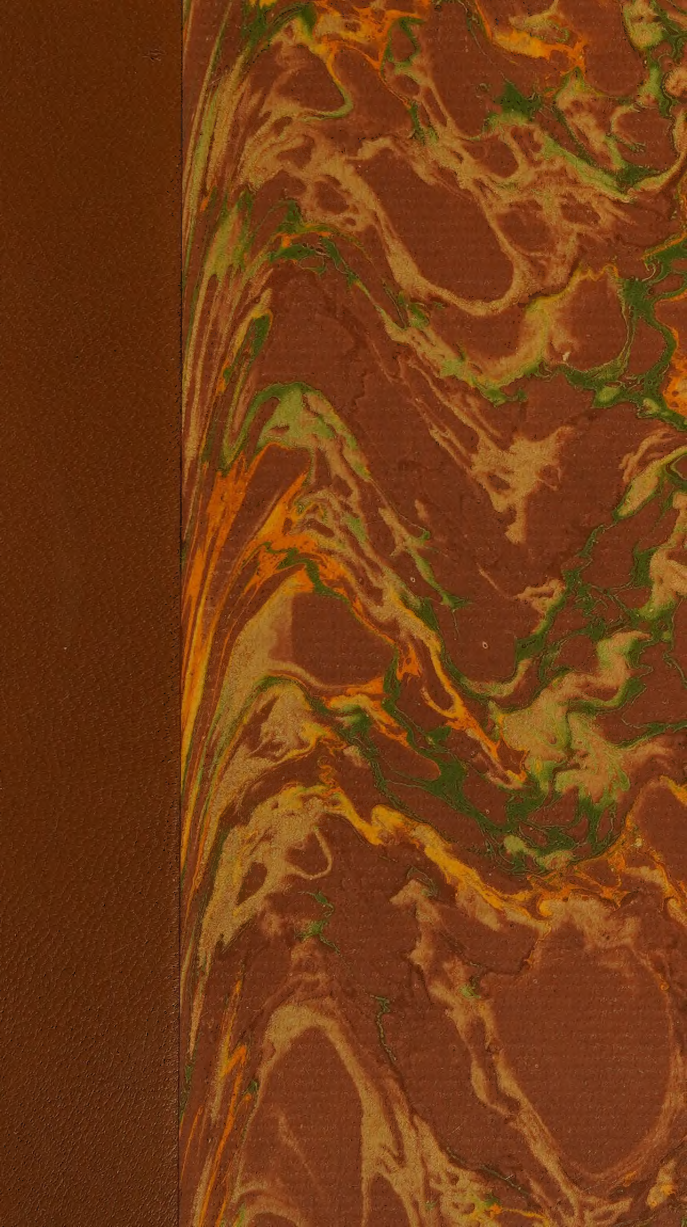






THE
ENGLISH PREACHER.

VOL. I.

T H E
ENGLISH PREACHER:
O R,
S E R M O N S
ON THE PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS OF
RELIGION AND MORALITY,
SELECTED, REVISED, AND ABRIDGED FROM
V A R I O U S A U T H O R S.
VOLUME THE FIRST.

L O N D O N:

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MDCCLXXIII.

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T H E

P R E F A C E.

THE humble office of a Compiler, though it affords little scope for the display of ability, and is at best a slender ground of reputation, is by no means without its use with respect to the public. When books, in any branch of science, or species of writing, have been so multiplied, that it is become exceedingly difficult for any one

person to peruse them ; or when the most valuable productions are dispersed through a great number of volumes, and mingled with others either wholly useless, or of inferior merit ; it is then extremely desirable, that those pieces which are most excellent in each kind should be selected from the rest, and brought into one view.

There seems to be a peculiar necessity for Compilations, with respect to Sermons. Many compositions of this kind have been published in Great Britain, which have done honour to our country, and have doubtless been of important service to the world. But amidst a great variety of sermons, it is to be expected that
there

there should be a diversity in their merit; and that while some must of course lie by neglected, others will deserve to be generally known and read, and to be carefully transmitted to posterity. In consequence of the taste for controversial, speculative, or critical preaching which formerly prevailed, we find in some of our best authors many discourses upon topics which are now pretty generally, and perhaps justly, considered as less useful, mixed with those which are moral or devotional. A Collection of such discourses as shall fall in with the taste for practical preaching, which seems at present to be happily gaining ground, and which should by all means be encouraged, is therefore to be wished for.

And even something farther than mere selection, may, it is imagined, be attempted with advantage. The circumstance of the length of many of our best sermons, is alone with many an objection against the use of them ; it not being easy, on a cursory reading, to abridge them, and at the same time retain the connection and spirit of the whole. Besides, in many sermons which are in the main excellent, there are some things hard to be understood, or foreign from the chief end of preaching, which might be omitted without any discredit to the author, or loss to the reader. There are likewise other sermons, which, though on subjects of general utility, have such frequent and express references to
the

the particular occasions on which they were preached, that they cannot with propriety be read throughout: whereas, probably the omission of a few paragraphs or clauses would remove the difficulty, and render them a valuable addition to the general stock of practical and moral discourses. Moreover, the method formerly used in the division of sermons, according to which all the thoughts in a discourse, both leading and subordinate, were parcelled out in regular divisions and subdivisions, numerically distinguished, is so different from the present, that the best discourse in which this peculiarity is retained, appears formal and antiquated. And lastly, such is the variable nature of

language, that many words and phrases which would not formerly have been noticed, now appear low and inelegant.

That a Collection of Sermons may be generally acceptable, it seems ~~therefore~~ proper, that the Compiler, while he faithfully retains the sentiments and diction of each author, should venture to omit those parts of a discourse which may best be spared ; to take off, in some degree, the air of formality from the ancient manner of dividing sermons ; and occasionally to change a word or phrase which time has rendered obsolete or offensive. These small alterations can be no injustice to the author, while his works continue

tinue extant in their original form, and may greatly contribute to render the reading of the same sermons more agreeable, and consequently more useful.

A Collection of Sermons, chosen, revised and abridged according to this plan, the Editor offers to the public under the title of the ENGLISH PREACHER.

The authors whose sermons are made use of in this Collection, are almost entirely such as wrote between the years 1660 and 1760. Before this period, there are few discourses which can be at all adapted to the taste of the present age. And with respect to the sermons published since that time, a republication at present,

by any other hands than the authors or their friends, would be equally unnecessary and impertinent.

The chief materials for such a work as this, must of course be gathered from writings already well known; but besides these, there are some selected from volumes little known, and others that have been published singly and never been generally read, which besides their own intrinsic merit, will to many readers have the recommendation of novelty.

The Editor flatters himself that this publication, may possibly be of use to PRIVATE FAMILIES, by furnishing them with a large collection

lection of discourses on the most important topics of morality and religion; and to YOUNG PREACHERS, by exhibiting before them at one view, a great variety of the best MODELS for their imitation; and will, he hopes, contribute somewhat towards the support of the interests of religion and virtue in the world.

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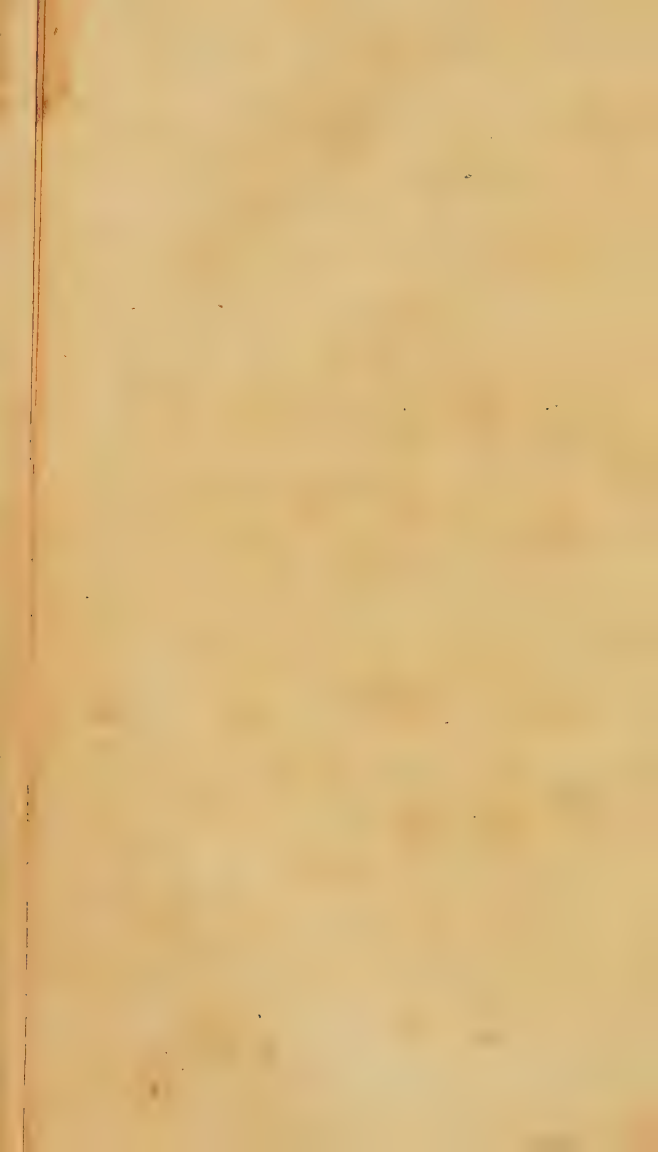
E R R A T A.

Page 170, line 25, *after confession add and.*

187, line 9, *in some copies, for distraction read*
detractiō.

203, line 9, *for infallible read inevitably.*

248, line 7, *for than read that.*



S E R M O N I.

ON THE EXCELLENCY OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

B Y

ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON.

B



S E R M O N I.

PHIL. iii. 8.

I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

IN these words the Apostle declares the high esteem he had for the christian religion, which he calls the “knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord;” the excellency of which appeared so great to him, that he valued nothing in comparison of the advantages which he derived from it.

My design at this time is to represent the excellency of the knowledge of the christian religion above that of any other religion or institution in the
B 2 world.

world. And here I shall not consider the external evidence which we have of the truth of christianity, and of the divinity of its doctrine, in which respect it hath incomparably the advantage of any other religion; but only the internal excellency of the doctrine itself, abstracted from its divine authority; and that in these four respects: as it more clearly reveals to us the nature of God, which is the great foundation of all religion; as it gives us a more certain and perfect law for the government of our lives; as it proposes to us more powerful arguments to persuade us to the obedience of this law; and as it furnishes us with better motives to patience under the evils and afflictions of life.

First; The christian religion more clearly reveals to us the nature of God, that any other religion ever did. To have right apprehensions of God is the great foundation of all religion; for according as men's notions of God are, such will their religion be. If they have gross and false conceptions of him, their religion will be absurd and superstitious. If they fancy him to be an ill-natur'd being arm'd with infinite power, one that delights

delights in the misery and ruin of his creatures, and is ready to take all advantages against them, they may fear him, but they will hate him too. And men will generally be such towards one another as they imagine God to be towards them; for all religion naturally inclines men to imitate the being whom they worship.

Now christianity gives us a more perfect, and a more lovely character of God than any other religion. It represents him to us as a pure spirit, and instructs us that he is to be worshipped in such a manner as is most suitable to his spiritual nature. "God is a spirit," says our Saviour, and they that worship him, must "worship him in spirit and in truth." It likewise gives us the most lively representation of the goodness of God, and his tender love to mankind, which is the best and most powerful argument to the love of God. He is stiled in the gospel "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of mercies, and the God of all consolation; the God of patience, the God of love and peace;" nay he is said to be love itself, and to "dwell in love."

Secondly ; The christian religion hath given us a perfect law for the government of our lives. All its precepts are reasonable and wise, requiring such duties of us as are suitable to the light of nature, and approve themselves to the best reason of mankind ; such as have their foundation in the nature of God, and are an imitation of the divine excellencies ; such as tend to the perfection of human nature, and to raise the minds of men to the highest pitch of virtue. The laws of our religion are such as are generally beneficial to the world, such as tend to the outward peace and health, the inward comfort and contentment, and the universal happiness of mankind. They command nothing that is unnecessary and burdensome ; they omit nothing that is reasonable and useful ; and they restrain us in nothing but what is contrary to the regular inclinations of nature, and to our true interest.

That this is the tenor of the laws of the gospel, will appear to any one from our Saviour's sermons and discourses ; particularly that upon the Mount ; wherein he charges his followers to be humble, and meek, and
righteous,

righteous, and merciful, and pure, and peaceable, and patient under sufferings and persecutions, and good and kind to all, even to those that are evil and injurious to them, and to endeavour to excel in all virtue. This will appear likewise from the writings of the apostles. St. Paul represents to us the design of the christian doctrine in a very few words, but of admirable sense and weight; “The
“ grace of God that bringeth salvation
“ hath appeared to all men, teaching us
“ that denying ungodliness and worldly
“ lusts we should live soberly, and right-
“ eously, and godly in this present
“ world.” And in his epistle to the Philippians he says, “Whatsoever things
“ are true, whatsoever things are honest,
“ whatsoever things are just, whatsoever
“ things are pure, whatsoever things are
“ lovely, whatsoever things are of good
“ report, if there be any virtue, if there
“ be any praise, think on these things.”

But the perfection and reasonableness of the laws of christianity will most plainly appear by taking a brief survey of them. Now they may all be referred to these two general heads. They are either such as tend to the perfection of

human nature, and to make men singly and personally good, or such as tend to the peace and happiness of human society. The precepts of the former kind may be distributed likewise into two sorts, such as enjoin piety towards God, or such as require the good order and government of ourselves with respect to the pleasures of this life.

All the duties of the christian religion which respect God are no other than those which natural reason dictates, excepting the two sacraments, and praying to God in the name of Jesus Christ. For the sum of natural religion as it refers more immediately to God is this; that we should inwardly reverence and love God, and that we should express our inward reverence and love to him by external worship and adoration, and by our readiness to receive and obey all the revelations of his will: that we should testify our dependance upon him, and our confidence in his goodness, by constant prayers and supplications to him for ourselves and others; that we should acknowledge our obligations to him for the many benefits which we every day receive from him, by continual praises and thankf-

thanksgivings : That on the contrary we should not entertain any unworthy thoughts of God, nor give that honour and reverence which is due to him, to any other ; that we should not worship him in any manner which is either unsuitable to the excellency and perfection of his nature, or contrary to his revealed will ; and that we should carefully avoid the profane and irreverent use of his name by cursing, or customary swearing, and guard against the neglect or contempt of his worship. This is the sum of the first part of natural religion ; these the general heads of those duties which every man's reason tells him he owes to God. And these are the very things which the christian religion expressly requires of us ; as might be evinced from particular texts in the new Testament. So that there is nothing in this part of christianity which does not perfectly agree with the reason of mankind.

The same may be said of those precepts which require the good order and government of ourselves, with respect to the pleasures and enjoyments of this life. The christian religion commands whatsoever things are pure and chaste, all

manner of sobriety and temperance, and moderation in reference to our appetites and passions; and forbids whatever is unnatural, unreasonable, and unhealthful in the use of pleasures. This is the import of all those texts which require of us that we should “not walk after the flesh but after the spirit,” that we should “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,” and that we should “be holy in all manner of conversation.” It requires us to “take heed and beware of covetousness, because a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” It forbids pride and ambition, and vain-glory, and commands humility and modesty, and condescension to others. In reference to sensual pleasures, it forbids all irregularity and excess, and strictly enjoins purity and temperance; cautioning us “to take heed lest we be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness;” and charging us “to walk decently as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness; and to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” Now all these precepts evidently tend to produce in us such virtues and dispositions

tions as are reasonable and suitable to our nature, and every way for our convenience and advantage as individuals.

The other sort of precepts are such as tend to the peace and happiness of human society. Now the reason of mankind can devise nothing more proper to this end than the laws of christianity. For they command all those virtues which are adapted to sweeten the spirits and allay the passions of men. They require us "to love our neighbour," that is, every man in the world, even our greatest enemies, "as ourselves." And for this end was the *Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, the feast of love instituted; that by commemorating the love of our dying Saviour, who laid down his life for his enemies, we might be put in mind how we ought to love one another.

By this law of loving all men, even our enemies, the christian religion discovers itself not only to be the most innocent and harmless, but the most generous and benevolent institution in the world. For in pursuance of this general precept it commands us "to do good to
"all men; if it be possible, and as
"much as in us lies to live peaceably

“with all men; to be kind one to another;” to be tender-hearted and compassionate towards those that are in want or misery, and ready to supply and relieve them; to sympathize with one another in our joys and sorrows, “to mourn with those that mourn, and to rejoice with them that rejoice; to bear one another’s burdens, and to forbear one another in love;” to be easily reconciled to such as have offended us; to be ready to “forgive from our hearts” the greatest injuries that can be offered us; and “to do good to them that hate us, bless them that curse us, and pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us.”

The laws of christianity likewise secure both the private interests of men, and the public peace, by confirming and enforcing all the dictates of nature concerning justice and equity, and requiring us to do to others as we would have them to do to us; and by forbidding violence and oppression, fraud, perfidiousness and treachery, breach of trust, undutifulness to superiours, and rebellion against lawful authority. And if there be any thing else that tends to disturb the peace of the world,

world, and to alienate the affections of men from one another, as sourness of disposition, and rudeness of behaviour, censoriousness and perverse interpretation of things, peevish and fretful humours, or whatever else may render the conversation of men grievous and uneasy to one another; all these are either expressly, or by clear consequence and deduction forbidden in the new Testament.

And now what could any religion do more towards reforming the dispositions and manners of men? What laws can be devised more proper and effectual to advance the nature of man to its highest perfection, and establish peace and happiness in the world, than these precepts of christianity?

Thirdly; The christian religion proposes the most powerful arguments to persuade men to the obedience of these laws. The gospel offers such considerations to us, as are adapted to work forcibly upon two of the most governing passions in the mind of man, our hopes and our fears. To encourage our hopes, it gives us the highest assurance of the greatest and most lasting happiness, in
case

case of obedience ; and to awaken our fears, it threatens sinners with the most dreadful and durable torments, in case of disobedience. “ To those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality,” it promiseth “ eternal life : but unto them that obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness,” it threatens “ indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish.” And this is that which makes the doctrine of the gospel so powerful an instrument for reforming the world, that it proposes to men such glorious rewards and such terrible punishments as no other religion ever did : and to make the consideration of them more effectual, it gives us far greater assurance of the reality of these things than ever the world had before. This account the apostle gives us of the success and efficacy of the gospel upon the minds of men ; and for this reason he calls it “ the power of God unto salvation,” because therein “ the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Now, the firm belief of a future judgment, which will “ render to every man

man according to his deeds," if it be well considered, is the most forcible motive of all others to a good life; because it is taken from the consideration of the greatest and most lasting happiness and misery of which human nature is capable. The laws of christianity have then the firmest sanction of any laws in the world to secure the observance of them. What can restrain men from sin, if the terrors of the Lord and the evident danger of eternal destruction will not? or what encouragement can be given to goodness beyond the hopes of heaven, and the assurance of an endless felicity?

Fourthly; The christian religion furnisheth us with the best motives and considerations to patience and contentedness under the evils and afflictions of life. It was one great design of philosophy, to support men under calamity, and to fortify their spirits against sufferings. And to this end the wisest amongst the heathens advanced all kinds of principles, and managed every little argument and consideration to the utmost advantage. Yet after all these attempts, they have not been able to give any considerable

derable comfort and ease to the mind of man under any of the great evils and pressures of this life. All the wise sayings and maxims which philosophers could collect to this purpose have proved ineffectual to the generality of mankind, and have only served to support some few stout and obstinate minds, which without the assistance of philosophy would have held up pretty well of themselves.

Some of the philosophers have run so far back for arguments of comfort against pain as to call every thing into question, and to doubt whether there were any such thing as sense of pain ; and yet when any great evil has been upon them, they would certainly sigh and groan as pitifully, and cry as loud, as other men.

Others have sought to ease themselves of all the evil of affliction by disputing subtilly against it, and maintaining that affliction is no real evil, but exists only in opinion and imagination ; and that therefore a wise man ought not to be troubled at it. But he must be a very wise man that can forbear being troubled at things that are very troublesome. And the best that can be made
of

of such an argument is, that it is good for nothing but to be thrown away as a stupid paradox, and against the common sense of mankind.

Others have endeavoured to elude their troubles by a graver way of reasoning, and have said, that these things are fated and necessary; and therefore no one ought to be troubled at them, it being in vain to be troubled at that which we cannot help. And yet perhaps it might as reasonably be said on the other side, that this very consideration, *that a thing cannot be helped*, is one of the most just causes of trouble to a wise man. For it were some kind of comfort if these evils were to be avoided, because then we might be careful to prevent them another time; but if they be necessary, then my trouble is as much fated as the calamity which occasions it; and though I know it is in vain to be troubled for that which I cannot help, yet I cannot but be afflicted.

The best moral argument to patience, in my opinion, is the advantage of patience itself. To bear evils as quietly as we can, is the way to make them lighter and easier; whereas to be restless,
only

only serves to enrage our pain, and to make the burden that is upon us sit more uneasily. This however is properly no consideration of comfort, but an art of managing ourselves under afflictions so as not to make them more grievous than indeed they are.

But the arguments which christianity proposes to us, afford just and reasonable encouragement to men to bear sufferings patiently. Our religion sets before us not the example of a stoic, who had by obstinate principles hardened himself against all sense of pain beyond the common measures of humanity, but an example that lies level to all mankind, of a man like ourselves, who had a tender sense of the least suffering, and yet patiently endured the greatest; of “Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

But the main consideration of all is, the glory which shall follow our sufferings, as the reward of *them*, if they be for God and his cause; and if upon any
other

other innocent account, as the reward of our *patience*. “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” And who would not be content to suffer upon terms of such advantage; “to pass through many tribulations into the kingdom of God;” to endure a short affliction for an endless happiness? The assurance of future blessedness is a cordial that will revive our spirits in the day of adversity, more than all the wise sayings and considerations of philosophy.

Thus I have briefly and plainly represented to you the excellency of the christian religion, both with respect to the clear discoveries which it makes of the nature of God, the perfection of the laws of christianity, and the power of its arguments to persuade men both to obey and suffer the will of God. From all which it appears, that the gospel describes God to us in all respects such a one as we would wish him to be; gives us such laws as every man who understands himself would chuse to follow; and proposes such arguments to persuade us to the obedience of these laws as no man that
wisely

wisely loves himself, and hath a true regard for his own interest either in this world or the other, can withstand.

And now methinks I may with some confidence challenge any religion in the world to shew such a complete body of holy and reasonable laws, established upon such promises and threatenings, as the gospel contains. If any man can produce a religion that can reasonably pretend to a greater confirmation than the gospel hath, a religion the precepts and promises and threatenings whereof are calculated to make men wiser and better, more temperate and more chaste, more meek and more patient, more kind and more just, than the laws and motives of christianity are adapted to make men; if any man can produce such a religion, I am ready to embrace it. Let but any man shew me any book in the world, the doctrines whereof have the seal of such miracles as the doctrine of the scriptures hath; a book which contains the heads of our duty so perfectly, and without the mixture of any thing that is unreasonable, or vicious, or anyways unworthy of God; that

that commands us every thing in reason necessary to be done, and abridgeth us of no lawful pleasure without offering us abundant recompence for our present self-denial; a book the rules whereof, if they were practised, would make men more pious and devout, more holy and sober, more just and fair in their dealings, better friends and better neighbours, better magistrates and better subjects, and better in all relations; and which offers to the understanding of men more powerful arguments to persuade them to be all this; let any man, I say, shew me such a Book, and I will lay aside the scriptures.

And do we not all profess to be of this excellent religion, and to study and believe this holy Book? But alas! who will believe that we do so, who observes the actions, and considers the lives of the greatest part of christians? How grossly and openly do many of us contradict the plain precepts of the gospel, by our ungodliness and worldly lusts, by living intemperately or unjustly, or profanely in this present world? As if “the grace of God which bringeth salvation,” had never appeared to us; as if we were
in

in no expectation “ of the blessed hope
“ and the glorious appearance of the
“ great God and our Saviour Jesus
“ Christ,” whom God “ hath appointed
“ to judge the world in righteousness,”
and who will bestow mighty rewards upon
those who faithfully serve him, but
will come “ in flaming fire to take ven-
“ geance on them that know not God,
“ and that obey not the gospel.”

Let us not then deceive ourselves by
pretending to this “ excellent knowledge
of Christ Jesus our Lord,” if we do not
frame our lives according to it. For
though we “ know these things,” we are
not happy unless “ we do them :” Nay
we are but the more miserable for know-
ing them if we do them not. Therefore
it concerns every one of us to consider
seriously what we believe ; and whether
our belief of the christian religion hath
its due effect upon our lives. If not, all
the precepts and promises and threaten-
ings of the gospel will rise up in judg-
ment against us ; the articles of our
faith will be so many articles of accusa-
tion ; and the great weight of our charge
will be this, that we did not obey that
gospel which we professed to believe.

Not

Not to believe the christian religion, after all the confirmation which God hath given to it, is very unreasonable; but to believe it to be true, and yet to live as if it were false, is the greatest contradiction that can be. He that does not believe christianity, either hath, or thinks he hath some reason for withholding his assent from it. But he that believes it, and yet lives contrary to it, knows that he hath no reason for what he does, and is convinced that he ought to do otherwise. And he is a miserable man indeed that does those things, for the doing of which he continually stands condemned by his own mind.

When we come into the other world, there is no consideration which will sting our consciences more severely than this, that we did wickedly when we knew to have done better, and chose to make ourselves miserable when we understood the way to have been happy. To conclude, we christians have certainly the best and the holiest, the wisest and most reasonable religion in the world; but then we are in the worst condition of all mankind, if the best religion in the world do not make us good.

SERMON



S E R M O N II.

THE INWARD PEACE AND PLEASURE
WHICH ATTEND RELIGION.

PSALM CXIX. 165.

*Great peace have they that love thy law,
and nothing shall offend them.*

THE word *peace* is often used in scripture in a very extensive sense, to comprehend all kinds of happiness; sometimes it signifies outward peace and quiet; in opposition to war and contention; and sometimes inward peace and contentment in opposition to inward trouble and anguish. I understand the

C

text

text chiefly in this last sense, not wholly excluding either of the other, and shall, accordingly, in the present discourse, endeavour to recommend religion from the consideration of the inward peace and pleasure which attend it. And surely nothing can be said more to the advantage of religion than this. For the aim of all philosophy, and the great search of wise men, hath been how to attain peace and tranquillity of mind.

To show that religion is productive of inward peace, I observe, that it is adapted to remove the chief causes of inward trouble and disquiet; that it furnishes us with all the true sources of peace and tranquillity of mind; and that the reflection upon a religious course of life and all the actions of it, yields great pleasure and satisfaction.

First; Religion is adapted to remove the chief causes of inward trouble and disquiet. These two, *doubting* and anxiety of mind, and *guilt* of conscience, are the chief causes of inward trouble and discontent. Now religion is adapted to free us from both these.

Though a man endeavour never so much to settle himself in the principles
of

of infidelity, and to persuade his mind that there is no God, and consequently that there are no rewards to be hoped for, nor punishments to be feared in another life; yet he can never attain to a steady and unshaken persuasion of these things. When he hath done all that he can to reason himself out of religion, his conscience will sometimes recoil upon him, and his natural thoughts and apprehensions rise up against his reasonings; and all his wit and subtilty will be confuted and born down by a secret and strong suspicion, which he can by no means get out of his mind, that things may be otherwise. And the reason is plain, because all this is an endeavour against nature, and those vigorous instincts which God hath planted in the minds of men to the contrary.

But he who entertains the principles of religion, and therein follows his own natural apprehensions and the general voice of mankind, and is not conscious to himself that he knowingly and wilfully lives contrary to these principles, hath no anxiety in his mind about these things. He is firmly persuaded they are true, and that he hath all the reason in the world

to think so; but if they should prove otherwise, which he hath no cause to suspect, yet he hath this satisfaction, that he hath taken the wisest course, and hath consulted his own present peace and future security infinitely better than the infidel hath done, in case he should prove to be mistaken. For it is a fatal mistake to think there is no God, if there be one; but a mistake on the other hand can have no future bad consequences, nor indeed any present inconvenience.

Another, and indeed a principal cause of trouble and discontent is *guilt*. Guilt is always attended with fear, which naturally springs up in the mind of man from a secret apprehension of the mischief and inconvenience which sin will bring upon him, and of the vengeance which hangs over him, and will overtake him either in this world, or in the other. And though the sinner, while he is in full health and prosperity, may divert and shake off these fears, yet they will frequently return upon him, on the apprehension of any approaching calamity. He is sensible that there is a just
power

power above him, to whose displeasure he is continually liable, and therefore he is always in fear. How long soever he may have escaped punishment in this world, he cannot but dread lest it should come upon him in the next; and the thought of this is a continual disturbance to his mind, and “in the midst of laughter makes his heart heavy.”

But religion secures a man from this torment, either by preventing the cause of it, or directing to the cure; either by preserving us from guilt, or freeing us from it in case we have contracted it. It preserves us from guilt by keeping us innocent; and in case we have offended, it frees us from it by leading us to repentance and the amendment of our lives; which is the only way to recover the favour of God and the peace of our own consciences, and to secure us against all apprehensions of condemnation in the world to come.

Secondly; As religion removes the chief grounds of trouble and disquiet, so it ministers to us all the true causes of peace and tranquillity of mind.

He who lives according to the rules of religion, is satisfied that he does that

which is most reasonable. And it is no small pleasure to be justified to ourselves, to be satisfied that we are what we ought to be, and do what in reason we ought to do; that which best becomes us, and which according to the primitive intention of our being is most natural. Whatever is natural is pleasant. Now religion and the practice of its virtues is the natural state of the soul, the condition for which God designed it. As God made man a reasonable creature, so all the acts of religion are reasonable and suitable to our nature: and our souls are then in health, when we are what the laws of religion require us to be, and do what they command us to do. As we find inexpressible ease and pleasure when our body is in its perfect state of health, and on the contrary every distemper causeth pain and uneasiness; so is it with the soul. When religion governs all our inclinations and actions, and the temper of our minds and the course of our lives are conformable to its precepts, all is at peace. But how can there be peace, so long as we act unreasonably, and do those things whereby we necessarily create trouble and disturbance to ourselves?

How

How can we hope to be at ease, while we are in a sick and diseased condition? The sick man may use what arts of diversion he will, and change from one place and posture to another: but still he is restless, because there is that within him which gives him pain and disturbance. So the wicked may dissemble their condition, and put on the face and appearance of pleasantness and contentment; but God, who sees the secrets of men's hearts, knows it is far otherwise with them. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

Another ground of peace which the religious man hath is, that he hath made God his friend. He that sincerely endeavours to please God, may rest perfectly assured of his favour; for "the
" righteous Lord loveth righteousness,
" and his countenance beholdeth the
" upright;" as "he hates the workers of
iniquity," so "he takes pleasure in them
" that fear him, in such as keep his co-
" venant, and remember his command-
" ments to do them."

And being assured of his favour, we are secured against the greatest dangers and the greatest fears; and may say with

David, "Return unto thy rest, O my
 "soul, for the Lord hath dealt boun-
 "tifully with thee; The Lord is my light
 "and my salvation, whom shall I fear?
 "The Lord is the strength of my life,
 "of whom shall I be afraid?" What
 can reasonably trouble that man who
 hath made his peace with God, and is
 restored to his favour who is the best
 and most powerful friend?

Moreover, the religious man most effec-
 tually consults his own interest and hap-
 piness. A great part of religion consists
 in moderating our appetites and passions;
 and this naturally tends to the compo-
 sure of our minds. He that lives piously
 and virtuously acts according to reason,
 and in so doing maintains the present peace
 of his own mind: and not only so, but
 he lays the foundation of his future hap-
 piness to all eternity; for religion gives
 a man the hope of eternal life. All
 pleasure doth not consist in present enjoy-
 ment; there is a pleasure too, in the firm
 belief and expectation of future good;
 and if it be a great and lasting good, it
 will support a man under many present
 evils. How great then must be the sa-
 tisfaction and delight which results from
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the hope of a blessed immortality ! How worthy the attention and pursuit of every wise man, is that godliness which hath the promise not only of the life that now is, but of that which is to come !

Thirdly ; The reflection upon a religious and virtuous course of life yields great pleasure and satisfaction. No man ever reflected upon himself with regret for having done his duty to God or man ; for having lived soberly, or righteously, or godly in this present world. On the contrary, the consciousness of any duty faithfully discharged, the remembrance of any good we have done, refreshes the soul with pleasure and joy. “ Our rejoicing is this,” saith St. Paul, “ the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.”

But on the other side, the course of a vicious life, all acts of impiety to God, of malice and injustice to men, of intemperance and excess in reference to ourselves, certainly leave a sting behind them. Whatever pleasure there may be in the present act, the remembrance is

so tormenting, that men are glad to use every art in their power to banish it from their minds. One of the greatest troubles in the world to a bad man is to look into himself, and to remember how he hath lived. I appeal to the consciences of men whether this be not true.

And is not this a vast difference between these two courses of life; that when we do any thing that is good, if there be any trouble in it, it is soon over, but the pleasure of it is perpetual: when we do a wicked action, the pleasure of it is short and transient, but the trouble and sting of it remains for ever? The reflection upon the good we have done gives a lasting satisfaction to our minds, but the remembrance of any evil committed by us leaves a perpetual discontent.

And, what is yet more important, a religious and virtuous course of life does then yield most peace and comfort when we most stand in need of it; in times of affliction, and at the hour of death. When a man falls into any great calamity, there is no comfort in the world like that of a good conscience; this
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makes all calm and serene within, when there is nothing but clouds and darkness about him. "Unto the upright there ariseth light in darkness." All the pious and virtuous actions that we do are so many seeds of peace and comfort, sown in our consciences, which will spring up and flourish most in times of outward trouble and distress, and at the hour of death. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. The righteous hath hope in his death." What a seasonable refreshment is it to the mind of man when the pangs of death are ready to take hold of him, and he is just stepping into the other world, to be able to look back with satisfaction on a religious and well-spent life! Then, if ever, the comforts of a good man overflow; a kind of heaven springs up in his mind, and he rejoiceth in the glory of God. And that is a true and solid comfort indeed, which will stand by us in the day of adversity, and stick close to us when we have most need of it.

"But with the ungodly it is not so:" His guilt lies in wait for him, especially
C 6 against

against such times; and is never more troublesome than in the day of distress. And surely affliction is then grievous indeed, when it falls upon a galled and uneasy mind. Were it not for this, outward afflictions might be tolerable; the "spirit of a man might sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" More especially at the hour of death, how does the guilt of his wicked life stare him in the face! What storms and tempests are raised in his soul, which make it like the troubled sea when it cannot rest! When eternity presents itself to his mind, and he feels himself sinking into the regions of darkness, and is every moment in fearful expectation of meeting with the just reward of his deeds; with what regret does he then remember the sins of his life! how full of indignation is he against himself, for having neglected to know the things that belong to his peace till they are hidden from his eyes!

If this representation be just, I need not multiply words, but may leave it to any man's thoughts in which of these conditions he would be. Surely the difference between them is so plain, that there can be no difficulty in the choice.

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It will perhaps be objected, that wicked men have some pleasure in their vices; but when all things are rightly computed, and just abatements made, it will amount to very little. Those sensual pleasures which are lawful, are much inferior to the least satisfaction of the mind; and when they are unlawful they are always inconsistent with it. And “what is a man profited,” if to gain a little sensual pleasure he lose the peace of his soul? Besides, those fits of mirth which wicked men have, are soon over. It is the comparison of a very great and experienced man; “Like the crackling of thorns under a pot,” saith Solomon, “so is the laughter of the fool,” that is, the mirth of the wicked man; it may be loud, but it lasts not. But, what is most considerable of all is, that the pleasures of sin bear no proportion to that long and black train of miseries and inconveniences which they draw after them; frequently poverty and reproach, pains and diseases upon our bodies; “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil.” So that if these pleasures were greater than they are, a man had better be with-
out

out them than purchase them at so dear a rate.

To those who object that religion imposeth many harsh and grievous things, which seem to be inconsistent with that pleasure and satisfaction I have spoken of, such as the bearing of persecution, repentance and mortification, and many other rigours and severities; I answer: as to persecution, it is not pretended that religion exempts men from outward troubles; but that, when they happen, it supports men under them better than any thing else. As to repentance and mortification; this chiefly concerns our first entrance into religion after a wicked life, which is acknowledged to be very grievous; but this doth not hinder but that, though religion may be troublesome at first to some persons, whose former crimes have made it so, it may be pleasant afterwards when we are accustomed to it. And whatever the trouble of repentance be, it is unavoidable, unless we intend to be miserable; for "except we repent we must perish." Now there is always a rational satisfaction, in submitting to a less inconvenience to remedy and prevent a greater. As for other rigours

gours and feverities which some pretend that religion imposes, I have only this to say, that if men make religion more troublesome than God hath made it, this cannot be helped; and, that it is a false representation of religion which some have given, as if it chiefly consisted not in pleasing God, but in displeasing and tormenting ourselves. This is not to paint religion like herself, but rather like one of the *furies*, with nothing but whips and snakes about her.

Nor is it any reasonable objection, that those who are religious are often disconsolate and full of trouble. This, I confess, were a great objection indeed, if religion were the cause of this trouble: but there are other plain causes of it, to which religion rightly understood is not necessary; such as false and mistaken principles in religion, the imperfection of our obedience to God, and a melancholy temper and disposition.

Thus I have endeavoured to represent to you what peace and pleasure, what comfort and satisfaction, religion rightly understood and sincerely practised is adapted to yield. And I do not know by what argument religion can be more effectually

effectually recommended to wise and considerate men. In persuading men to be religious, I do not attempt to rob them of true pleasure, but to direct them to the best, and indeed the only way of attaining and securing it.

I speak this in compassion to those who make it their great design to please themselves, but grievously mistake with respect to the means. The direct way is that which I have set before you, a holy and virtuous “life, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, “ and live soberly and righteously and “ godly in this present world. A good “ man,” saith Solomon, “ is satisfied from “ himself:” he hath the pleasure of being wise and acting reasonably; of being justified to himself in what he doth, and of being acquitted by the judgment of his own mind. There is a great pleasure in being innocent, because that prevents guilt and trouble: it is pleasant to be virtuous and good, because that is to excel many others; and it is pleasant to grow better, because that is to excel ourselves: nay it is pleasant even to mortify and subdue our lusts, because that is victory. It is pleasant to command our appetites and passions, and
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to keep them in due order, within the bounds of reason and religion, because that is a kind of empire. It is naturally pleasant to rule and have power over others ; but he is the great and absolute prince who commands himself. This is “ the kingdom of God within us,” a dominion infinitely to be preferred before all “ the kingdoms of this world, and “ the glory of them.” It is the “ kingdom of God” described by the apostle, which consists “ in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” In a word, the pleasure of being good and doing good is the chief happiness of God himself.

If all this be true, (and I am confident I have every man’s conscience on my side) let us venture to be wise and happy, that is, to be religious. Let us resolve to “ break “ off our sins by repentance,” and to “ fear God and keep his command-
“ ments.”

And may the God of peace make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us always that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord !

SERMON



S E R M O N I I I .

ON HEARING THE WORD OF GOD.

LUKE, viii. 18.

Take heed therefore how ye hear.

THOSE, who have written concerning the art of oratory, have been very diligent to lay down certain rules and precepts, by the careful observance of which, men might so speak as to persuade. But since persuasion depends much more upon the disposition of the hearers, than upon the skill of the speaker, it seems very requisite, that
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the art of hearing should be as much studied, as the art of speaking; and that rules should be proposed to direct men how to hear, as well as to instruct them how to speak. Where the minds of those, who are spoken to, are rightly prepared, there less skill in the speaker will suffice to work upon them: but when men's understandings are prejudiced, when their affections are corrupted, when their wills are biased; then the power of eloquence, be it ever so great in itself, is wholly lost upon them; and "they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear, which will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charming never so wisely."

That the word of God preached in the present day is not so prevalent as it was, when preached by the apostles and ministers of the gospel in the first ages of the church, is confessedly in a great measure owing to the unskilfulness or negligence of those who preach it. But on the other hand it must also be owned, that the unfruitfulness of our preaching is in some measure owing to inattention or prejudice in those to whom we preach.

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We do not find, that the apostles themselves were at all times equally successful in the work of the ministry. Nay our Saviour himself, “who spake as never man spake,” did not work the same conviction in the breasts of all those, who heard the words of grace and truth, that came out of his lips. The different reception his doctrine found, according to the different dispositions of his hearers, gave rise to the instructive parable of the sower, whose seed brought forth more or less fruit, not according to the skill of him who scattered it, or according to the virtue of the seed itself, but according to the nature of the soil into which it fell: that which fell by the way-side, was trodden down; that which fell on rocks, withered away; that which fell among thorns, was choaked; only that, which fell upon good ground, brought forth fruit, and even that not equally, but in proportion to the richness of the soil, some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, and some an hundred-fold.

Since therefore the efficacy of the word of God, even when preached by Christ himself, did so much depend upon the manner in which it was heard; since the failures

lures of those who heard it made it ineffectual even there, where there was no failure in him, who spoke it; and since, where there are manifold defects in the preacher, the greater care is requisite in the hearers; that caution, which was given by our blessed Saviour to his disciples, cannot but be still more necessary to be observed by us, that we should “take heed how we hear.”

Now, that we may so hear, as to profit by hearing, it is required,

First; That we hear with attention.

Great and wonderful is the efficacy of the word of God upon the hearts of men. “As the rain cometh down, and
“the snow from heaven, and returneth
“not thither, but watereth the earth,
“and maketh it bring forth and bud,
“that it may give seed to the sower, and
“bread to the eater: so shall my word
“be that goeth forth out of my mouth;
“it shall not return unto me void, but
“it shall accomplish that which I please,
“and it shall prosper in the thing where-
“to I sent it.” But this word must first have an entrance into our hearts, before it can bring forth fruit there. If the earth be closed up, so as not to drink in
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the rain that cometh upon it, if the showers that fall from heaven be ever so plentiful, it is in vain to expect any increase: and if men's ears are shut against instruction, though in the language of Moses, the preacher's "doctrine shall drop as the rain, and his speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass;" yet under all these means of improvement they will still continue barren and unfruitful.

In the oratory of the ancients, those who studied to excel, thought it the first and principal point of their art, to make their hearers attentive; but we, whose office it is to preach the word of God, may very well presume upon the attention of those, to whom we address ourselves. The weight of what we deliver, and the authority of him in whose name we deliver it, sufficiently bespeak the most earnest application of our hearers. If the search after divine wisdom were much more painful and laborious, than it is, the acquisition of it would more than countervail all the trouble we are, or can be at, in its pursuit. Those, who have possessed wisdom in the most eminent

nent measure, have thought no price too great to purchase it. “Buy the truth
“and sell it not; wisdom is the principal
“thing, therefore get wisdom, and with
“all thy getting get understanding; the
“merchandise of it is better than the
“merchandise of silver, and the gain
“thereof than fine gold; she is more
“precious than rubies, and all the things
“thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her;” are the maxims of men as wise in their generation, as any of those, who pretend to be best acquainted with the true value, and intrinsic worth of every thing. But when this valuable commodity is to be had at a small price; when this useful knowledge may be obtained by carefully attending to the words of those who are appointed to teach it, and by inclining our ears to their sayings; it betrays unpardonable negligence and folly, “if when wisdom crieth out,” and “uttereth her voice,” we will not hearken to her counsel, but despise all her reproof; if we do not listen to the wholesome advice of the son of Sirach, “My son, if thou wilt, thou shalt
“be taught; and if thou wilt apply thy
“mind, thou shalt be prudent: if thou
“love to hear, thou shalt receive understanding

“ standing; and if thou bow thine ear,
“ thou shalt be wise. Let thy mind be
“ upon the ordinances of the Lord, and
“ meditate continually in his command-
“ ments.”

Another qualification requisite in those who hear the word of God read or preached, is, that they should hear it with impartiality.

Great and exceedingly glorious are the advantages, which in the scriptures are proposed, and by the ministers of Christ speaking from the scriptures promised to all true christians: manifold and terrible are the judgments, which the same scriptures denounce, and which God’s ministers, if they will not betray their trust, must proclaim aloud against all those,
“ who hold the truth of Christ in unrighteousness.” What fascination then hath beguiled the sons of men, that we find them so credulous in applying to themselves the privileges that are appropriated to the faithful, whilst they are so little kept in awe by the woes and curses that are threatned against the impure, the unrighteous, and the ungodly! Whilst we instruct our people out of the scriptures, that “ we have redemption through

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“ the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace ; that he gave himself for us an offering, and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling favour,” to the end that he might “ make reconciliation for iniquity, and put away sin by the sacrifice of himself;” we are sure to be heard with pleasure. But when at any time we warn our hearers out of the same scriptures, that “ this grace of God, that bringeth salvation, teacheth us to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world :” when we put them in mind, that Jesus Christ did therefore “ give himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity,” (from the practice, as well as from the guilt of sin) “ and might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works ;” whilst we give them true notions concerning the end of Christ’s sufferings, and shew them, that “ Christ his ownself bore our sins in his own body upon the tree,” to this very purpose, “ that being dead unto sin we should live unto righteousness ;” whilst we urge the necessity of a holy life, and exhort them to the plain duties
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of sobriety, and temperance, of doing no wrong to any man, or of making restitution where they have done wrong, of living peaceably with all men, of being diligent in their callings, of being compassionate to the miserable, and of being ready to distribute liberally to the necessities of their brethren; our instructions are disregarded, perhaps despised. Thus doth prejudice and partiality corrupt the minds of men, and hinder that good influence, which the word of God read or preached unto them might otherwise have upon their lives.

Another qualification required of those who would be profitable hearers of the word of God is, that they should hear it with meekness.

This is expressly enjoined by St. James, that "we should receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save our souls." There is in the generality of men such a rooted principle of self-love, such an aversion to any thing that tends to abate the good opinion they have of themselves, such a willingness to be deceived concerning their own character, and such a reluctance to have their eyes opened to see their faults,

that the only way to gain their good opinion is to flatter them in their vices ; “ to speak peace to them, where there is no peace ; ” and to be careful not to do, or say any thing, which may awaken their consciences out of their deep slumber. They go on securely in the paths of vice without any inward check or remorse ; and whilst they apprehend no danger from these wicked courses, whilst they fondly indulge themselves in their sins, they think they have a right to the same indulgence from others. Men would willingly enjoy the pleasures of sin, without feeling the smart of it ; its work they like very well, but they are not so well pleased with its wages : that therefore the fear of future punishments may not imbitter their present enjoyments, they do all they can to shake off the belief of a judgment to come. But if the principles of religion be so strongly implanted in them, as not easily to be rooted out ; if the early impressions of it are too deep to be quite defaced, their next care is to put the evil day as far off from them as they can, to banish the thoughts of it out of their minds, and to dismiss such melancholy considerations, as Felix did

did St. Paul, "to a more convenient season." It is no wonder therefore if they cannot with patience bear those preachers, who faithfully endeavour to detect this dangerous cheat, which they put upon themselves; who bring home to their view those dangers, which they strive to keep at the utmost distance; and who warn them of that sword which hangs over them, is kept up by a very slender thread, and is every moment ready to fall upon their heads. It was this love of present ease, this hatred of the light, and fear of being disturbed in the quiet enjoyment of their sins, which made the Israelites to "say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits."

How natural soever the love of truth is said to be, yet some truths are sure to be hated, and to expose them to hatred, who are so hardy as to declare them: and though the desire of self-preservation is also said both to be natural, and to work strongly in all men; yet it is plain, that some men are so much devoted to ruin, and so in love with their own
D 3 destruction

destruction, that they look upon those as their best friends, who most contribute to it, and those as their worst enemies, who attempt to save them. Now whilst men are thus impatient of those admonitions, which are intended for their benefit, instead of reaping any advantage from them, they are rather made worse by them. By the ruggedness of their humours, and the peevishness of their tempers, that wholesome food, which is administered to them, is turned into gall: "the things that should have been for their eternal peace," and, if they had received them as they ought, would have been so, do, through their own perverseness, prove "unto them an occasion of falling."

If therefore men would receive profit by hearing the word of God preached unto them, they must hear it with candour, and meekness, with patience and temper; without any ill-will, nay with some degree of good-will towards those who preach it. Were reproof for our sins an injury to us, did it proceed from malice, and were it designed for our detriment, like other wrongs, it should

should be born by us with patience ; but since it hath a real tendency to our good, and, unless it be through our own fault, cannot but be subservient to our greatest interest ; since it is an act of friendship, and the proper fruit of love ; since it is so far from being an unpardonable injury, that it is the noblest instance of christian charity towards us ; those who administer it to us have a title not only to our forgiveness, but to our thanks ; and those who receive it with thankful minds will make it prove unto themselves, what in its own nature it truly is, a real and lasting advantage.

Another qualification requisite in those who hear the word of God preached unto them, is, that they should hear it with an actual intention of practising it.

Some there are, who place a great part of their religion in hearing sermons ; who think, that if they have been present at these pious exercises, if they have carefully listened to them, but especially if they have been warmly affected by them, they have, without going any farther, done a good work, of itself and for its own sake holy and acceptable unto

God. Such persons as these do not sufficiently distinguish between essential, and instrumental duties; between such as are on account of their own intrinsic goodness required, and such as are enjoined us, merely as they are subservient to the former. Though all the duties of the gospel are commanded by the same authority, yet the gospel doth not lay the same stress upon all: and though it doth not become us arbitrarily to compare the duties of our religion, and according to our own fancies to cheapen some, by enhancing the price of others, where the law of God makes no such distinction; yet, where the law itself expressly makes a difference, there it is not only lawful, but necessary that we should make the same.

Now any one, who is conversant in the scriptures, cannot but be aware that the duties there commanded are sometimes brought into comparison, and pronounced to be some of less, some of greater moment: some are said to have an absolute, some only a relative value; some are in their own nature good, and therefore always good; some are good only in a particular respect, and therefore
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where that respect fails, are no longer good: some have that close and inseparable connexion with a state of purity and holiness, that we cannot doubt but they must be required at our hands by a pure and holy being: and some only contribute to the forming in us new or greater degrees of holiness, and on this account alone are well pleasing to God. Now the hearing of the word of God is to be placed under this lower rank of duties; it is not upon its own account, and for its own sake acceptable, but as an instrument appointed, among many others, for our improvement in virtue: where it is made use of as an instrument, there may be expected great advantages from it; but where it is rested in as itself an end, and not directed to any higher and nobler end, there it becomes useless and unprofitable. As often therefore as we hear the word of God, we ought to hear it with an actual purpose and ready disposition of mind to obey it. We may then expect to find benefit by frequenting the assemblies of the church, when we come thither with sincere intentions of knowing God's will, in order to practise it: when we enter his house with the disposition of mind,

which the prophet Ifaiah expreffes in thefe words ; “ Come ye, and let us go up to
“ the mountain of the Lord, to the houfe
“ of the God of Jacob, and he will teach
“ us of his ways, and we will walk in his
“ path.”

Let us therefore, as St. James exhorts,
“ be doers of the word, and not hearers
“ only, deceiving our own felves.” Let
what is written in the clofe of the book
of Revelations, be carefully remembred,
and duly confidered by us : “ Bleffed are
they” not that know, but “ that do his
“ commandments, that they may have
“ right to the tree of life, and may enter
“ in through the gates into the city.”

S E R M O N IV.

THE FOLLY OF MOCKING AT SIN.

PROV. xiv. 9.

Fools make a mock at sin.

THERE is nothing, concerning which men of great spirits are more apt to make a wrong judgment, than concerning the notion and true extent of courage and magnanimity. Courage, is a braveness of mind, consisting and showing itself in a just contempt of danger. And because this is a
D 6 virtue

virtue most usually found in men of better condition, and of a good education; it is therefore generally accompanied with more reputation and honour, with more value and esteem in the world, than most other single virtues. For this reason, those who are not endued with this virtue, are yet very desirous of being thought to be so; and, as that which is most esteemed is always most in danger of being counterfeited, false courage is very apt to supply the place of the true. For there is a courage, which deserves not that name, and there is a hardiness, which is not a virtue, but a vice. Something of this nature may be observed with respect to almost every virtue. Superstition, and forms, and outward ceremonies, too usually supply the place of true piety towards God. Covetousness calls itself frugality; and the name of generosity often covers the real crime of profuseness. The most unchristian vices of uncharitableness and persecution frequently pass under the title of zeal; and love towards God, is in some men's opinion properly expressed by hatred towards their brethren, towards men very often much more
pious

pious than themselves. Thus likewise in the case of courage; fool-hardiness too often puts on the garb of this virtue; and a senseless pretending to despise, what ought not and cannot be despised, serves instead of really contemning such dangers, as ought to be contemned. Now the way to distinguish rightly, when courage is really that virtue which the name denotes, is to consider carefully the true definition: which, as I before observed, is this; a greatness or bravery of mind, consisting and showing itself in a just contempt of danger. Where therefore the contempt of danger is just and well-grounded, there such contempt is the true virtue of courage, a true greatness and bravery of mind: but where the contempt of danger is neither reasonable nor just, there it is not courage, but fool-hardiness and madness. For want of observing this plain distinction it comes to pass, that whereas it is true greatness and bravery of mind, for a man to hazard his life in the defence of his country, in defence of the common rights and liberties of mankind, in opposition to the unjust invasions of ambitious tyrants, and the great oppressors
of

of the world; (contempt of danger, in this case, being just and well-grounded, because a man hazards himself for the public benefit, and for the preventing a much greater and more extensive evil than the loss of his own single life) from hence passionate and unreasonable men ignorantly call it courage, to hazard their lives in their own private quarrels; where contempt of danger is, on the contrary, neither reasonable nor just; because, neither is the danger at all needful to be run into, nor is the benefit proposed to be obtained by it, in any manner equal to the evil hazarded. Again: Whereas it is true greatness of mind, to be above all vain superstitions, to despise all false and groundless imaginations, not to be terrified with empty phantoms, nor fear where no fear is; hence weak and profane men have ridiculously attempted, to consider and represent it as a piece of courage and gallantry, to despise the real differences of good and evil; to mock at truth in common with error, and at religion and virtue equally with superstition; to affect to be above the obligations even of the most reasonable and necessary laws, without

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out which no order, no government, no peace could possibly subsist in the world; lastly, to dare undauntedly to revile the Maker of all things, and show their fearlessness even of God himself, by openly trampling upon his commandments in their lives, and reproaching his name by vain oaths and profane speeches. The fortitude of these men, is like that of a soldier, who not daring to do his common duty against the public enemy, should be perpetually showing his prowess in bravely refusing to obey the orders of his proper commander. These are the persons, who, in the worst and highest sense of the phrase, "make a mock at sin;" and who are accordingly in the text represented as being guilty of the worst and highest degree of folly.

But more particularly, in the first place, those "make a mock at sin" who esteem it a piece of courage to despise all religion, and a greatness of mind to deride all the obligations of virtue. These are the persons the Psalmist means, when he elegantly rises by steps in his description of sinners, from the lowest degree of wickedness to the highest; "Bless-
ed is the man that hath not walk-
ed

“ed in the counsel of the ungodly, nor
 “stood in the way of sinners, and hath
 “not sat in the seat of the scornful.”
 The scornful, are those whom the prophet Jeremiah represents under the same character, and in the use of the same word, as the wise man in the text, “I sat not in the assembly of the mockers.” To sit (the word used both by Jeremiah and the Psalmist) signifies a fixt, determinate, secure, resolute establishment in a habit of wickedness; whereas walking, or standing, in the way of sinners, represents only particular wicked actions. The persons who, in this sense, “make a mock at sin,” are the atheists, and the openly profane; those who think it wit, to turn the most serious matters into ridicule; and commit the most unjust and unrighteous actions, without reluctance or abhorrence. These are the persons whom Solomon describes, when he says, “It is as sport to a fool to do mischief;” and again, “As a mad-man who casteth fire-brands, arrows and death; so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, am not I in sport? The same sort of persons,

persons, are in the New Testament thus characterised by St. Jude, "Remember," "saith he, "the words which were spoke before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, how they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts."

The next class of sinners, who may justly be charged with "making a mock at sin," are those, who do not indeed in words, like those before-mentioned, but yet, in their actions, do equally bring contempt upon religion. In their profession they pretend to believe in God, but their practice is the same with that of atheists and infidels. These men are described by St. Paul thus, "They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him; being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." This practical insult upon religion, this contempt of virtue and goodness in men's lives and actions, is as really in the sight of God, though not so offensively in the eye of the world, a "making a mock at sin," as the most profane speeches even of professed atheists.

To

To make a mock at sin, may, in the last place, signify entertaining so slight an opinion of the evil and danger of sin, as leads men who are not entirely profligate, to content themselves with distant resolutions of future repentance, and in the mean time to speak peace to themselves in the practice of unrighteousness, or in the enjoyment of unlawful pleasures. This may properly enough be called, though not in so high a sense as the forementioned instances, a “making a mock at sin.” It is seeming to be afraid of sin, and yet not really abhorring it. It is entering voluntarily into the snare of the devil, and yet not daring to resolve to continue in it. It is running into a danger, with a design to come out of it again; “as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.” In a word; it is playing with the instruments of death, and sporting with destruction: for want of seriously and in earnest considering, what a dreadful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God.

And now, having shown particularly, what is meant by this phrase of “making a mock at sin;” I proceed to consider

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der upon what grounds or reasons men are tempted to be guilty of the several degrees of this vice. And

First; As to those who sit in the seat of the scornful; those profane spirits, who esteem it a mark of courage to despise all religion, and a greatness of mind to deride all the obligations of virtue: the only ground these have to go upon, is atheism and infidelity. Either they must disbelieve the being of God, and disclaim all difference of good and evil, and renounce in general all expectation of a future state; or at least they must reject all divine Revelation, casting behind them all the promises and threatnings of God, and denying that he will ever judge men according to their works. This is excellently represented to us by St. Peter, in his second Epistle; "There shall come," "saith he, "in the last days, scoffers, "walking after their own lusts, and "saying, where is the promise of his "coming? For since the fathers fell "asleep, all things continue as they were "from the beginning of the creation." The persons the apostle here describes, looked upon all things as going on, it seems, in a necessary course of nature: one

one generation of men passed away, and another came in the room of it: but the world remained still as it was; and thus, for aught they knew, things might continue forever. "The thing which hath been," they thought, "is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun." Upon this foundation, the licentious have argued with themselves in all ages; "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink, and to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." There is a most elegant description of this sort of sinners, in the second chapter of the book of Wisdom, "The ungodly said, reasoning with themselves but not aright; We are born at all adventures, and we shall be hereafter as though we had never been; for the breath in our nostrils is as smোক, and a little spark in the moving of our heart. Come on therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are at present, and let us speedily use the creatures like as in youth. Let

" us

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“ us oppress the poor righteous man, let
“ us not spare the widow, nor reverence
“ the grey hairs of the aged; let our
“ strength be the law of justice, for that
“ which is feeble is found to be nothing
“ worth.” Thus the only foundation
this kind of mockers build upon, is the
hope that there will be no future state,
or judgment to come.

With respect to the second sort, those who
pretend to believe a God, and another
life after this, and yet live as viciously
as if they believed not; the manner of
these, is to flatter themselves with a no-
tion, that sin is not of so dangerous a
nature, as the preachers of the gospel
represent it; that morality, or righteous-
ness of life, is not in reality of indis-
pensable importance; and that God will
be very well satisfied with a form of god-
liness, with a zeal for names and distinc-
tions of religion, though not accompa-
nied with moral virtue.

As to the last sort of men, who I said
might also justly be charged with being in
some degree guilty of “making a mock
at sin;” namely, those who are really sen-
sible of the necessity of true repentance and
amendment, and yet at the present speak
peace

peace to themselves in the practice of unrighteousness, or in the enjoyment of unlawful pleasures: the whole foundation these can possibly go upon, is an artificial design of securing to themselves both worlds, and of engrossing more happiness than either God or nature designed them; by enjoying securely the pleasures of sin for a season, and at the end by repentance likewise obtaining the reward of virtue. This is what the apostle calls "mocking of God;" and is indeed more truly a mocking or deceiving of themselves. As will appear, if we proceed to consider, how weak all the forementioned grounds or reasons are, upon which men are tempted to be guilty of the several degrees of this vice: and consequently how great the folly is of acting upon these grounds: "Fools make a mock at sin." And,

First; As to the highest order of profane mockers, who have no other hope to rest upon but that of atheism and infidelity; their folly is greater than can be expressed in words, or than can rightly be conceived by any imagination. For, what is the state of such a person, when God taketh away his soul? Can he be
 sure

sure that there is no God? or can he demonstrate to himself, that there will be no future state? The hardiest unbeliever never yet pretended to have demonstration in this case. And if he had, yet all the comfort, all the hopes, that could be built even upon that, would be but the hope of a beast, the expectation of perishing as if he had never been. But since there can be no demonstration, on the side of atheism; the consequent possibility on the other side, that there may be a God, proves the folly of the profane mocker to be intolerable; the probability that there is a God, still increases that folly; the certainty, the demonstration, that there cannot but be a God, shows it to be what Solomon elegantly sets forth in that accumulative expression, "the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness." For if there is a God, as the works of nature demonstrate that there is; both reason itself declares, and revelation fully confirms, that he will govern the world in righteousness, and in the end judge every man according to his works. That poor objection of the scoffers mentioned by St. Peter, that all things hitherto continue

tinue as they were from the beginning of the creation, and that therefore they never will be otherwise; discovers the extreme weakness of those men's understandings, who consider not that God with much long-suffering gives men space of repentance, and can as easily judge the world after a thousand years as after one day's space. Upon which delay of his Lord's coming, if any wicked servant flatters himself that he will not come at all, and upon that assurance of impunity hardens himself in his impiety; "the Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." For, "as in the days that were before the flood, men were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark; and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away:" And, "as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot

"went

“ went out of Sodom, it rained fire and
“ brimstone from heaven, and destroyed
“ them all : even thus,” says our Lord,
“ shall it be, in the day when the Son
“ of Man is revealed.” Then shall the
Lord convince ungodly men of all their
hard and profane speeches which they
have spoken against him ; and the wicked,
seeing the salvation of the righteous,
“ shall with anguish of spirit say within
themselves,” as it is elegantly expressed
in the book of Wisdom, “ We fools ac-
“ counted his life madness, and his end
“ to be without honour ; how is he num-
“ bered among the children of God, and
“ his lot among the saints !”

Secondly ; As to those who cannot argue themselves into infidelity, but believe the certainty of a future state and of a judgment to come ; and yet live viciously, and continue impenitent, upon a general, loose, and inconsiderate expectation, that sin is less dangerous, and God more merciful, than the preachers of the gospel represent him : the folly of “ making a mock at sin” in this sense, and upon this ground (which is indeed nothing else, but resolving to neglect a mortal disease as of no danger, and to shut one’s eyes upon the

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mouth

mouth of destruction) the folly of this, I say, is well reprov'd by the author of the book of Ecclesiasticus, "My son, flee from
 " sin as from the face of a serpent; for
 " the teeth thereof are as the teeth of a
 " lion slaying the souls of men; and, all
 " iniquity is as a two-edged sword, the
 " wounds whereof cannot be healed."

To imagine that God will be pleas'd with an empty form of godliness, and accept a zeal for mere names and distinctions of religion, without true virtue and holiness of life, is, to be so foolish as to think God more easily deceived, even than mortal men; and that the searcher of hearts will be impos'd upon with an outward profession of service, which even an earthly superior would with indignation reject. "Little children," saith St. John, "let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness, is righteous." The vain hope of those who rely on any other foundation, is beautifully described in the 5th chapter of the book of Wisdom: "The
 " hope of the ungodly, is like dust that
 " is blown away with the wind; like a
 " thin froth, that is driven away with
 " the storm; like as the smoke which is
 " dispers'd here and there with a tempest;
 " and

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“ and passeth away as the remembrance
“ of a guest, that tarrieth but a day : But
“ the righteous live for evermore ; their
“ reward also is with the Lord, and the
“ care of them is with the most high.”

Thirdly and lastly ; As to those who are sensible of the indispensable necessity of a virtuous life, and yet at the present speak peace to themselves in the practice of unrighteousness and in the enjoyment of unlawful pleasures, upon an intention of repenting and amending hereafter : the folly of “ making a mock at sin” in this sense, is the folly of playing with death, and sporting with destruction : it is the folly of letting slip opportunities, which possibly, nay, very probably, may never be retrieved : it is the folly of provoking God to cut us off in his wrath, and to assign us our portion among hypocrites and unbelievers : to conclude, it is the folly of incapacitating a man’s self more and more for the doing of that, which yet it is of absolute necessity not to leave undone. For except we do effectually repent and amend, and that speedily too, so as to bring forth the fruits of virtue and righteousness, we must inevitably perish : and yet the longer any

man continues in sin, the more difficult it becomes for him to leave it off. For he grows hardened at length through the deceitfulness of sin; and by being long accustomed to do evil, it becomes (figuratively and comparatively speaking) as difficult for him to learn to do well, as for the "Ethiopian to change his skin, or the leopard his spots." The prophet Jeremiah most elegantly sets forth the same difficulty in another comparison, with which I shall conclude: "If thou
"hast run with footmen, and they have
"wearied thee, then how canst thou con-
"tend with horses? And if in the land
"of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they
"wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in
"the swelling of Jordan?"

That every one of us, may in time set about the practice of our duty, before the things that belong to our peace be hid from our eyes, God of his infinite mercy grant!

S E R M O N V.

THE UNCHANGEABLE DIFFERENCE OF
GOOD AND EVIL.

ISAI. V. 20.

*Wo unto them that call evil good, and
good evil; that put darkness for light,
and light for darkness; that put bitter
for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*

THAT there is originally in the
very nature of things, a necessary
and eternal difference between good and
evil, between virtue and vice, is clearly

E 3 implied

implied in these words, by the prophet's comparing the difference between good and evil, to that most obvious and sensible difference of light and darkness. And it is not without great reason, that he supposes this difference of good and evil to be so plain and self-evident, that it cannot be proved by any thing more clear and manifest than itself. For in like manner as any man, who should be so absurd as to contend, that there was no difference between light and darkness, could not be confuted by any argument more strong, than the evidence of his own senses ; so to any one who will perversely deny all difference between good and evil, it is not easy to offer any better argument, to convince him of this great and fundamental truth, than by appealing to the reason and conscience of his own mind. Not because there is any real difficulty or obscurity in the thing itself to be proved ; but on the contrary, because it is so very plain and evident, that scarcely any foreign argument can by the strictest proof make it more clear and certain than it was before.

Natural good and evil, in such instances wherein we are personally concerned

cerned, and where the effect is not very remote, we are always sufficiently sensible of, and abundantly able and careful to distinguish. Death and life, sickness and health, pleasure and pain, poverty and riches, honour and disgrace, are differences of condition, concerning which there is no dispute, and no danger that men will be careless or negligent. Death and life; pain and pleasure, happiness and misery, men cannot but distinguish; and must of necessity always pursue the one, and endeavour to avoid the other. Yet in these very things is originally founded the difference of moral good and evil, which they are so apt to neglect; and it is only for want of attending to the issues and consequences of things, that men are ever guilty of so fatal a mistake. That which tends truly and universally to the perfection of human nature, and to the general happiness of mankind, is moral good, as well as natural: and moral evil, is that which corrupts and depraves and dishonours our nature, and renders it truly miserable; which disquiets men's minds, and weakens their bodies; which ruins their estates, and destroys their reputation;

which breaks laws, and disturbs good government, and disorders and confounds the world. These respective effects are sometimes remote indeed, and at distance; and this is that which deceives and imposes upon men: but they are nevertheless most certain, and necessary effects; and of direct, proper, and natural consequence: so that even in nature, virtue and vice, wisdom and folly, are as necessarily distinct, and as unalterable as happiness and misery themselves. God hath so constituted our nature, that the same things which truly and universally promote our happiness, are likewise the chief instances of our duty; and the universal performance of our duty, is plainly the most natural and direct means to attain true and lasting happiness. The accidents of this world, and the extreme wickedness of men, make it sometimes indeed prove otherwise for a short season: but the final event of things is always such as I have now described; and the order of nature tends to render it so likewise, even in all the present intermediate spaces of time.

The fear and love of God, the imitation of his nature, and the obeying of his

his commands; the sense of his present and future favour, who is the supreme Lord and infinitely powerful governour of the whole world; are evidently the only foundations of solid peace and satisfaction in which a rational and immortal spirit can possibly acquiesce. Piety therefore towards God, is as necessarily good in itself, and of as unchangeable obligation in nature and reason, as the Creator is of necessity infinitely superior to his creatures; and as settled peace and satisfaction of mind, which can only arise from the sense of his favour, is necessarily the ground and condition of our happiness. Temperance and sobriety, diligence and patience, the due government of our appetites, and restraint of our passions, are the only natural and most certain means of preserving the health of our bodies, of improving the faculties of our minds, and of keeping ourselves constantly in such a disposition, as is necessary to qualify us for the regular performance of all the other duties of life. He that suffers himself to be deprived of his reason, either by violent passion, or by great intemperance and excess, has no guard left, that can

secure him from falling into the greatest crimes. Such government of ourselves therefore, is as necessarily good and obligatory in the nature of the thing itself, as it is confessedly useful and excellent in its effects. Justice and righteousness, goodness and charity, faithfulness and truth, subjection to government, obedience to laws, due respect to authority, according to men's several qualities and stations in the world, are the only possible means of preserving the peace and welfare of the public, the order of societies, and mutual protection and support, on which depends all our happiness, all our enjoyments, and whatsoever is most valuable amongst men. These things therefore are as unchangeably wise and good, and the practice of them is as indispensably enforced upon us by the eternal reason of things, as it is natural and necessary for us to desire both our own private happiness, and the public welfare of mankind.

Wicked and unreasonable men, who will be governed by no rule, but their present appetites, look not so far before them, as to form true judgments and
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take right measures concerning their proper happiness. Whatever gratifies their present appetite or passion, that they chuse as good and conducive to their happiness ; not considering that in the course of things it may be the greatest evil in the world, either directly to themselves, or consequentially by being injurious to other men, and destructive of publick peace and order. For want of this consideration it is, that they confound the natural and eternal differences of things ; judging of good and evil, by no other measure, but by their own sudden passions, changeable appetites, disorderly and unreasonable inclinations. If they get beyond this, and are forced to confess that the necessity of things, the very nature and constitution of the world (lest every thing should run immediately into the utmost confusion) obliges them to be under some kind of rules and restraints ; yet, far from having any generous and noble principles of true virtue and goodness, they will go no further than they are compelled, nor acknowledge any other difference between good and evil,

E. 6. *than*

than what is forced upon them by the authority of law or custom.

And yet concerning these also, it is as evident, that good and evil, are things prior and superior to human laws, and which they cannot alter, as that the difference of light and darkness does not depend upon the will and pleasure of men, and cannot be changed by them. The true and only reason of all human laws, is to enforce and secure the practice of such things, as are before in their own nature good, and useful, and profitable to society. For, if this were not the case, it would not be of any importance, whether these or the very contrary practices were enjoined by laws. It is not therefore the force and obligation of the law, which makes a thing become good and reasonable to be practised; but it is the wisdom and goodness of the things themselves, which is the ground and foundation of all wise laws, and which makes it necessary, that men should by authority and by laws be compelled to do that, which if there had been no law at all, it would nevertheless have been reasonable and good
for

for them to do. We are infinitely obliged by nature and reason, to worship and adore God, to pray and to give thanks to the supreme author and preserver of our being; and to do all the good we can to men, in our several stations, promoting universally the happiness of our fellow-creatures, and the peace and good order of the world. It is fit the fear and authority of laws, should prevent such men from opposing and hindering this great end, who perhaps would not otherwise be restrained by the obligation of right reason, or by the fear of God. But the obligation of right reason would still have been the same, though no human laws had laid any such compulsion upon men, nay even, if it could be supposed that all positive laws and all human authority whatsoever, should require us to act the contrary part. If all the nations in the world, should conspire in having such a false notion of honour and glory, as to account it truer greatness to destroy and ruin, than to protect mankind and preserve the liberties of nations, and the common rights of human societies; yet it would neither be wise, nor good, nor reason-

reasonable, neither truly great nor honourable so to do; any more than men's agreeing to call poison wholesome, would make it really be so; or the opinion or declaration of any number of men, could make darkness put on the nature of light.

Wicked and unreasonable men, powerful tyrants and oppressors, the greatest debauchees and votaries of unlawful pleasures, when they are above the censure of all human laws, and have little or no reverence for those that are divine, yet often know that they do evil, and cannot deny but that it would be better to do otherwise. They are sensible that the practice of virtue and goodness, is infinitely more reasonable than debauchery and injustice; and though their lusts and passions have such dominion over them, that they cannot forbear doing unjust and unrighteous actions, yet they see at the same time a more excellent law, they know better things, and cannot but approve them as more wise and reasonable. This is a true obligation upon them, to return into the ways of virtue and religion: the sense of this obligation they cannot get rid of; the uneasiness which it gives their minds, they cannot

cannot shake off: it is this which makes them pass a severe judgment upon their past actions, whenever they reflect on them; and to chuse even the present pleasure or unjust acquisitions with difficulty and remorse. The reproach of conscience imbitters all their sinful enjoyments; and they secretly condemn themselves, where the laws of men have no power to condemn them. The crimes they commit, are a continual burden upon their minds. And were it not, that evil habits and ungoverned lusts keep them in perpetual bondage, they would infinitely rather chuse the satisfaction of being innocent, and wish always that they could separate the pleasure and profit from the crime. The actions of men that live virtuously and religiously, they cannot but approve of; and they condemn in others the very same practices, which they are guilty of themselves. They will trust a virtuous man in any business of importance, much rather than those who partake with them in their vices; and desire always to have their affairs managed by men of uprightness, righteousness and integrity. In fine, they at last always wish themselves in the place of the righteous; and say
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in their hearts, “ Let me die the death
 “ of the righteous, and let my last end
 “ be like his ;” hereby clearly acknowledging the excellency of virtue, its necessity in order to secure the welfare of mankind, and the unchangeableness of its obligation. By all these things, the worst of men do themselves give testimony to the truth of this general proposition, That there is originally in the very nature of things, a necessary and eternal difference between good and evil, virtue and vice ; to which the reason of things does itself oblige men to have a constant regard.

God hath moreover, by his supreme and absolute authority, established this original difference of things, and will support and maintain it by his immediate power in the government of the world. This may in a good measure be inferred even from what we naturally know concerning him. For God being the sole author and creator of all beings ; it is plain that their natures are such as he was pleased to make them ; and that their relations one to another are the result of that constitution, which the Creator in his wisdom has thought fit to establish.

establiſh. The nature of things is therefore the law of God; and whatever is agreeable or disagreeable to right reason, must be ſo likewise to the will of the author of nature. Wherefore ſince good and evil, as hath been already ſhown, are neceſſarily and eternally different in the nature of things, as light and darkneſs are in the frame of the world, and in the judgment of our ſenſes; it is manifeſtly the will of God, that the one ſhould be the rule of our moral actions, as the other is the guide of our natural ones. “The light of the body is the eye,” as our Saviour himſelf expreſſes it; meaning to ſignify by an eaſy ſimilitude, that our minds ought to be guided by reaſon and truth, as our bodies are by the ſight of the eyes. In this reſpect, the light of nature itſelf ſufficiently condemns all the workers of unrighteouſneſs; making it appear that the practice of iniquity in every inſtance, is as truly and for the very ſame reaſon a contempt of the authority of God, as it is an abſurd confounding of the natural differences of things. The order and harmony of God’s creation, depends upon every creature’s acting according to the law of its nature:
And

And this law of nature to men, is, our obligation to govern ourselves by that particular understanding and knowledge, whereby we are distinguished from the inferior part of the creation; whereby we are enabled to discern between good and evil; and by which, as it is expressed in the book of Job, "God hath taught us more than the beasts of the field, and made us wiser than the fowls of heaven." God has endued us with faculties, by which we are able to see and distinguish what will promote the welfare and happiness of the world; and he has given us those faculties for that very end, that by distinguishing things rightly, we might direct our choice to such actions always as are most universally useful and beneficial to mankind. God himself, in his government of the world, does always what on the whole is best; that is, what tends most to the good of the whole creation; and so far as we are capable of understanding his attributes and manner of acting, so far it is manifest we are obliged to imitate his nature; and in our several stations to conform ourselves to the likeness of so excellent an example, by the study and practice of all goodness
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and holiness, righteousness and truth. This is the first ground and foundation of all religion: this is that knowledge of God and of his will, which nature implants, and reason confirms, in which all the wisdom in the world centers, and on which all the happiness of rational creatures depends.

God hath likewise confirmed this law by new authority, illustrated it with greater light, distinguished it by plainer and clearer bounds, and enforced men's observation of it by new motives and stronger obligations. For this purpose he sent his son into the world, to be born, to live and to die for us, that he might effectually destroy the works of the devil, and overthrow the kingdom of darkness. For this he hath expressly revealed his wrath from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; that the eternal difference of good and evil, when men had neglected to be moved by the voice of nature and reason, might be supported by divine authority, and by the voice of God himself. To this all the precepts of the gospel tend, and in this all our Saviour's discourses terminate. To this
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all his promises gently invite and draw us, and all his threatnings loudly command and strongly impel us. This is the end, to which all other things are directed as the means. This is finally good and profitable unto men. On this depend all the blessings of the present life, and all the happiness of a future eternity.

From what hath been said we may observe, that religion and virtue are truly most agreeable to nature, and that vice and wickedness are of all things the most contrary to it. It is naturally the part of reasonable beings, to observe the differences that are in the natures of things; and therefore if good and evil, be naturally and necessarily different, it is manifest it must needs be agreeable to nature (unless strangely corrupted with evil habits) that men should live religiously by discerning and chusing what is good, and avoiding what is evil. Men do indeed frequently err in this matter, and are wilfully blinded by innumerable corruptions, by customs and evil habits, by pleasure and interests, by false opinions and loose practices; and then, to excuse and vindicate themselves,
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they take refuge in the follies of infidelity, and presumptuously call “light darkness, and darkness light.” As a palate vitiated by a long disease, ceases to distinguish between sweet and bitter; so these hardened sinners mock at all difference of good and evil. But still the natures of things remain unalterably what they were, and cannot but justify themselves to the reason and understanding even of those very men that unreasonably deny them. It is not nature, (as they weakly and falsely reproach it) but unnatural and corrupt inclinations, that lead them to wickedness. Nature and reason, as well as revelation, call upon men to be religious; and virtue and goodness are as truly agreeable to the mind, as light is to the eyes, or sweetness to the taste. Their own consciences reproach them as often as they act otherwise; and no worldly advantages whatsoever, no power on earth, can ever discharge them from this obligation. Solomon had greater experience, and made more observations upon these things, than any other man that ever lived; and the sum of all his observations, is this reflection: “Then I saw that wisdom excelleth

“celleth folly, as far as light excelleth
“darkness.”

From hence it likewise appears, that the judgments of God upon impenitent sinners, who obstinately disobey the most reasonable and necessary laws in the world, are just and righteous judgments. When the supreme power and authority of God, imposes nothing upon us, but what the very nature of the things themselves makes necessary, what the consciences of sinners themselves cannot but approve as most reasonable and excellent, and what the happiness of man immediately and directly consists in, as well as the law of God makes it his duty to observe; surely sinners must confess before all the world the righteousness of God's judgments manifested in their destruction, if they will not by his goodness be led to repentance!

Lastly; From what has been said it appears certain, that those who would separate religion from a holy life, and make it to consist merely in speculative opinions, or in outward solemnities of worship, do greatly corrupt religion. The design and very essence of religion, is
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to make men good and happy : the design of the revelation of the gospel, is to destroy superstition, and to restore the truth of religion, by correcting men's opinions and reforming their manners. If without this, men will pretend to be religious by any other method, they wholly mistake the nature of religion, and the design of the gospel of Christ. If they will not add to their faith virtue, but think it sufficient that they hold the truth, though it be in unrighteousness ; they are like the man who, our Saviour tells us, " built his house upon the sand : " their very faith itself will but increase their guilt ; and the truth which they profess, will but the more severely condemn them for being workers of iniquity. Which condemnation that we may all escape, God of his infinite mercy grant !



S E R M O N VI.

ON SELF-LOVE.

2 TIM. iii. 2.

Men shall be lovers of their own selves.

THE phrase, “Lovers of their own selves,” which may sometimes bear a good sense, is here plainly intended in a bad one. It stands first among the many black characters recited by the apostle; probably because it is the root and principle of other vices, the source and fountain of all the evils and disorders of the moral world. The apostle doth

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not condemn every kind of self-love, but self-love ill conducted, and misapplied; self-love emphatically so called, centring in self only, and standing in opposition to the love of God, and the love of our neighbour. There is a just and rational self-love which is found in the very wisest and best of men: there is also a self-love natural both to good and bad men: and there is an irregular, inordinate self-love peculiar to wicked men. These three kinds of self-love ought to be carefully distinguished from each other, for the information of our judgment, and direction of our practice.

My design then is to state and clear the notion of self-love, that we may perceive distinctly how far, and in what instances, it is innocent, or commendable, and likewise in what cases and instances, it becomes culpable and vicious, and how it does so. In the prosecution of this subject, I shall first consider what self-love in the general, is, the nature, design, and purport of it, and how far we innocently may, or reasonably ought to pursue its dictates; then proceed to explain the nature, and show the tendency of a vicious self-love, and illustrate it

it by proper instances; and lastly, offer a few considerations proper to prevent or cure it.

Self-love, considered in the general, abstracted from particular circumstances, is neither a vice nor a virtue. It is nothing but the desire which every man hath of his own happiness. It is an instinct of nature common to all men, and not admitting of any excess or abatement. All our pursuits, practices, and endeavours flow from this fountain. It is this which actuates all our powers and faculties.

As God hath implanted in us this principle of self-love, the spring of all our movements, so hath he also endued us with reason for its direction. Reason holds out the light, and shows us the way to happiness, while the instinct of self-love drives us on in the pursuit of it. The latter without the former would be no better than blind instinct.

Now, self-love, while it is under the guidance of reason directing it to true and solid happiness, is rightly employed, and may be called a rational, and commendable principle. One general rule may serve to distinguish the true and ra-

tional self-love, from that which is culpable and vicious. Self-love directed to, and pursuing, what is, upon the whole, and in the last result of things, absolutely best for us, is innocent and good: and every deviation from this is culpable more or less so, according to the degrees and the circumstances of it.

We can never be obliged to chuse any thing which upon the whole, and in the last result, tends to our destruction: or to refuse any thing which upon the whole, and finally, tends to our happiness. For this would be obliging us to hate ourselves, which is impossible: it would be obliging us to something under pain of being happy upon refusal, and in hopes of being rewarded with misery, which is wholly contradictory and absurd, and therefore no obligation. But the wisdom and goodness of Almighty God is highly conspicuous in this affair; that since the general happiness of the whole rational or intellectual system is what he himself proposes as the noblest end, and holds forth to all his creatures; and yet no one can pursue any good but with a regard either immediately or more remotely to himself; God hath been pleased so to connect

connect and interweave those two, one with the other, that a man cannot really pursue his own particular welfare, without consulting the welfare of the whole. His own private happiness is included in that of the public: and there is, in reality, no such thing as any separate advantage, or felicity, opposite to the felicity of the whole, or independent of it.

We may then depend upon it as a safe and certain rule, that “self-love, pursuing what is upon the whole, and in the last result of things, absolutely best for us, is innocent and good.” This will take in all manner of virtues, and all degrees of them; and withal carries a sufficient motive along with it; namely, that into which the force of every obligation is finally resolved. From this general principle, thus asserted and vindicated, we may now proceed to particular acts and instances of an innocent and commendable self-love, for the clearer illustration of the subject.

It is evident to every considering man, that we are not born for an hour, or for a day, or for this life only, but for endless ages. And therefore the wisest course for any man to take, is to secure an in-

terest in the life to come; this is certainly, upon the whole, and in the last result, absolutely best for him. He may love himself, in this instance, as highly, and as tenderly as he pleases. There can be no excess of fondness, or self-indulgence, in respect of eternal happiness. This is loving himself in the best manner, and to the best purposes. All virtue and piety are thus resolvable into a principle of self-love. It is what scripture itself, in other words, resolves them into, by founding them upon faith in God's promises, and hope of things unseen.

In this sense, it may be truly said, that there is no such thing as disinterested virtue. It is with reference to ourselves, and for our own sakes, that we love even God himself. "We love him, because he loved us:" that is, because we love ourselves. His favour is our highest good, and the source of all our happiness; and we most truly love ourselves in loving him.

In opposition to the doctrine here laid down, some fanciful men have pretended that any view to our own interest and happiness, is mercenary, and takes off from the merit of piety and virtue; leaving

ing it less worthy of esteem: as if it were not sufficient for perfect love to cast off fear, but it must cast out hope too. Virtue, they say, must be entirely disinterested, separate not only from all low and sordid views of temporal things, but from all views whatever, all prospect of advantage, and chosen for its own sake only. But such persons mistake the maxim of the old philosophers, from whom they seem to have borrowed their notion, attending more to the sound of words, than to the truth of things. The meaning is no more than this, that true virtue, cannot be founded on any low temporal regards; neither ought it to be forsaken, however unserviceable it may sometimes prove to our worldly interests or pleasures. True and solid virtue is indeed disinterested, in respect of any mean and sinister views, but not entirely and absolutely so. Those who pretend to follow virtue for virtue's sake, yet heighten and magnify the delight and pleasure attending it. They plead that it is agreeable to nature, as food is to the appetite; as beauty, order, and symmetry to the eye, or to the mind. That is, it carries temporal pleasure and satisfac-

tion along with it ; and it is for the sake of that pleasure, they embrace and follow it. And what else is this, but chusing virtue upon a principle of self-love ; which pursues a present satisfaction, and makes temporal good its end ? The difference then is only this ; that they who practice virtue without any regard to a life to come, do it upon an inferior motive, of meaner, because present, consideration : and there will be so much the less of virtue in it as it comes short of that noble and generous principle of faith, by which a man can be content to wave all thought of present pleasure and advantage, and to wait for a reward hereafter. In a word then, a regard to future happiness is so far from rendring our piety, or virtue, less worthy of esteem, that it most of all enobles, and enriches it, and is indeed the perfection of it.

What I have here said, is confirmed by holy scripture, in many places ; and particularly in the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, which is entirely employed in magnifying the virtue of faith. The sublimest virtues for which Moses is there justly celebrated, are resolved
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into this; that “he had respect unto the recompense of reward.” The same thing is plainly intimated of Abel, Noah, Abraham, and other antient worthies there recited.

From hence then it appears sufficiently evident, that it is no disparagement to virtue, to suppose it founded in self-love rightly understood, but that the very best of men are, in a good sense, lovers of their own selves, in as high a degree as any others are, or can be.

Having shewn that self-love, while pursuing eternal happiness, is allowable and commendable, and not so much as capable of any excess in measure or degree; we may from hence infer, that there can be no culpable self-love but in respect of temporal things. And yet, even in this respect, there may be a degree of self-love, not only innocent, but praise-worthy. Temporal felicity may undoubtedly demand a share in our affection and concern. The first and most natural dictate of self-love is to endeavour to be always easy, and never to be afflicted with any degree of pain, misery, or trouble. Present happiness is what we all perpetually wish for, if real-

ly good for us, and it is what even the wisest and best of men would not submit to part with, but for the sake of something better. To deny ourselves any gratification, without an equivalent either in hand, or in prospect, is unnatural and unreasonable. It is refusing happiness formally considered as such; and is therefore neither a rational, nor indeed a possible choice. For the like reasons it is natural for us to endeavour after a speedy deliverance from any present uneasiness, by all proper methods: and all are proper which do not in their consequences, here or hereafter, tend to involve us in more or greater. No man can be induced to submit to any thing painful, but in order to avoid something more painful: for that would be chusing misery as such, and would be a degree of self-hatred, of which our nature is not capable. What man, in his senses, would chuse to be uneasy so much as for a moment, without a valuable consideration for it, or to prevent the suffering of something worse?

One would not indeed covet any satisfactions in this life, the enjoyment whereof might deprive us of greater good: nor
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would a wise man desire to be delivered from present pains, by any such methods as would draw after them a train of greater evils. This would be folly and madness. And therefore it is the height of imprudence to violate at any time the rules of religion and virtue, which are of eternal concernment, for the sake of any temporal good; besides that the practice of virtue is so generally necessary to happiness, even in a temporal respect, that it can seldom be of any real and lasting advantage, even at present, to deviate from it. But within these bounds, and with proper cautions, some degree of our love may reasonably be placed upon temporal things. And indeed there is no man so resigned, and dead to the world, as not to make it, in some measure, the object of his affection and care; looking upon the comforts and conveniencies of life as the blessings of heaven, and as contributing to his repose and tranquility. It is possible (though it be a fault on the right hand, and not very common) to love the world too little. Some have been so superstitious, as to think religion almost inconsistent with any worldly ease or pleasure: and have run into an ex-

treme of self-denial, mortification, and corporal austerities. But this is a real error. A chearful and moderate enjoyment of the good things of this life, is well-pleasing to God, as well as suitable to the nature of man. To torment and afflict ourselves needlessly, is not more unnatural in itself, than it is displeasing to God, who delights in the happiness of his creatures, and chuses rather an easy and chearful, than an austere and rigid obedience. If therefore we love present happiness, only in that proportion or degree which will not interfere with a greater happiness to come; if our love of riches, honours, or pleasures be wisely and justly regulated, and kept in due subordination to those things which are more excellent, and of infinitely higher concernment; there is then no harm, but rather much good in it; and such a self-love, exerting itself in the pursuit of temporal things, may well become a wise and good man. Having considered what kind of self-love is innocent or commendable, and in what degree; I proceed,

To consider the nature and tendency of a vicious self-love, and to illustrate it

it by proper instances. From what hath been said, it may appear that there is no danger, no possibility of loving ourselves too well; but we may possibly love some things too much. When we blindly follow the instinct or appetite of self-love, coveting every thing which looks fair and flattering, and running greedily after it, without weighing circumstances, or considering consequences; or when, to get rid of any present pain or uneasiness, we take any method which first offers, without reflecting how dearly we may pay for it afterwards; I say, when we act thus, then it is that our self-love beguiles us, degenerates into a vicious, or at least, foolish appetite, and comes under the name of an excessive or inordinate self-love; the very essence and spirit of which consists in a blind regard to some present ease, convenience, or satisfaction, without attending to what it may afterwards cost us, or to the final result of things.

If the love of any present pleasure, humour, or interest, so entirely possess the heart, as to drive out all due regard to the honour of God, and the good of man-

mankind, then it is emphatically called self-love, or more properly selfishness : not that such persons love themselves more truly, or more highly than others do ; but they so love themselves as to love none besides ; they are lovers of themselves only. A good man loves himself as highly, and as tenderly as possible ; but then he takes into his scheme of happiness the love of God and men, as an essential part of it. The vicious lover of himself, on the other hand, affects a kind of separate, independent happiness, without a due regard either to God or man ; vainly hoping to make himself happy in despite of both. He is weak enough to expect happiness from a few fading and transitory enjoyments ; in the mean while contemning, or at least neglecting, the two essential ingredients of all true and solid felicity. To understand the nature of this delusion, let us trace its steps and progress, in two or three of the most remarkable instances of it, as pride, sensuality, and avarice ; from whence we may form a judgment of all the other instances that come under it.

To begin with pride. All the happiness of life is summed up in two articles ;
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pleasing thoughts, and pleasing sensations. Now, pride is founded in self-flattery; and self-flattery is owing to an immoderate desire of entertaining some kind of pleasing thoughts. It is a pleasing imagination for a man to fancy himself possessed of uncommon privileges or endowments. The more he dwells upon the thought, and the more he magnifies to himself his real or imaginary perfections, the higher his satisfaction rises; and in time it becomes painful and mortifying to him to think otherwise. Thus far it is no more than self-flattery, kept up purely by the inward pleasure attending it, and the sensible pain and uneasiness of being checked or contradicted in it. The next step is to set a high value upon himself, for what he conceives great or considerable belonging to him; and he proceeds to demand respect and deference from others, suitable to the opinion and esteem which he has of himself. Thus commence pride, haughtiness, and arrogance. Upon this, envy, hatred, animosity, and revenge ensue against all that stand in his way. He must depress others, in order the more to aggrandize himself; and must endeavour to obstruct his

his neighbour's happiness, lest it should prove in any measure prejudicial to his own. Thus the unhappy man, for the pleasure only of a fond thought at first, runs himself by degrees into innumerable irregularities, and anxieties. So blind is self-love, in some instances, so inconsiderate is selfishness, that it most effectually baffles and defeats its own designs.

Another instance of inordinate, ill-conducted self-love is sensuality. It so far agrees with pride, that it makes men pursue the present gratification at the expence of the public peace, and to their own future misery and ruin. The happiness which it pretends to, is in itself mean and degrading; and inevitably draws after it innumerable mischiefs, either in this world or the other.

A third instance of blind and inordinate self-love is, avarice, or self-interest-
edness. This is of larger and more diffusive influence than either of the former. So great a part of temporal felicity is conceived to depend upon riches, that the men of this world lie under the strongest temptations to this vice. If the case be such, that treachery and fraud, guile and hypocrisy, rapine and violence, may be
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serviceable to the end proposed; the vicious lover of himself will practise them, rather than be defeated of his covetous designs, or bear the uneasiness of a disappointment. Thus he comes to prefer his own private, present interest, before virtue, honour, conscience, or humanity.

With respect to himself and his own real happiness, he runs into the same fallacy and misconduct which I before mentioned. He considers not what would be good for him upon the whole, and in the last result, but contrives only for a few days, or years at most. The height of his ambition reaches not beyond temporal felicity; and he miscalculates even with respect to this. He divests himself of all the soft and good-natured passions of humanity, kindness, pity, and tenderness; in the exercise of which consist the most refined and delicate pleasures of life. He considers not that honesty, friendliness, and generosity, are qualities very agreeable to a rational nature, and come recommended by their own sweetness; that they are adapted to attract the eyes and hearts of men, create reverence and esteem, and tend to render any person, who is remarkable for them, the delight
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of mankind. Upon a just balance of the account, the vicious lover of himself will be found no gainer, in respect even of worldly happiness; and yet that is but a trifle, in comparison of joys eternal.

These instances may be sufficient to shew both the nature of self-love, in the bad sense, and the folly of it. I have insisted more upon the hurt which such persons do to themselves, than upon the mischief they bring upon others: because the former is indeed the most considerable; and yet, being less open and visible, is the least taken notice of. They are enemies to all mankind: but still they are the greatest enemies to their own selves. They hinder and obstruct the happiness of many for a time; but they entirely defeat and destroy their own.

The apostle has observed, and all men know, that times are perilous, where such persons abound. For, what a world of savages should we soon find, if the narrow, selfish principles prevailed; if beneficence, love, and kindness, which hold the world together, were to be banished from among men! The truly noble and generous principle for which every man is designed, and in which his
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own particular happiness is contained, is that of an universal benevolence and good-will towards all. And any affections, or inclinations, deviating from thence, or opposite thereto, are so many degrees of selfishness, or approaches towards it. From whence we may remark, that if any be lovers of their own country, and that only, regardless of the rules of humanity, justice, and equity with other nations, they are so far selfish, and are, in a large sense, “lovers of their own selves only.”

If any, still more straitened in their affections, instead of seeking the common good of their country, confine their good wishes, services, and endeavours to their own tribe, sect, or party, regardless of the common rules of equity, justice, or charity towards others; they are lovers of themselves in a stricter sense than the former; and indeed in as strict a sense as men commonly can be. Even thieves and robbers, however narrow and selfish in their principles and practices, yet are usually true, just, and kind to their partners and associates. The very persons whom the apostle condemns as lovers of themselves only, extended their affections and ser-

services respectively, beyond their own proper persons. They were linked together for mutual defence ; and while they were fierce, cruel, and implacable towards all besides, they respected, valued, and loved one another.

Let men be ever so selfish, they do not pretend to be entirely independent, and detached from their kind. They can carry on but few designs without confederates and assistants. And there is usually a semblance of social virtue, and of christian charity, kept up among the members of the same faction, or party. They love one another at first sight ; are kind, open, and affable : they see no faults in each other, or else kindly excuse them : they have a compassionate tenderness for each other in case of any disaster ; and in case of good fortune they rejoice in common. All this is right ; and it might pass for christian charity, did not their partiality and disaffection, their hatred and rancour against others, betray the narrowness of a party-principle, instead of the large and generous spirit of true christianity.

Having thus traced the grounds and causes of inordinate self-love, and pursued

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ed it through the most remarkable acts and instances in which it discovers itself, it now only remains,

To offer a few considerations, proper to prevent or cure it.

It is very evident, from what hath been said, that the persons we have described, are not greater enemies to others in intention, than they are in effect to themselves. Yet it is not less evident, that they love themselves; and that whatever hurt they do to their own selves, they certainly mean none. They run upon it “as a horse rusheth into the battle, as “an ox goeth to the slaughter, and as a “bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth “not that it is for its life.” This is not owing to meer stupidity, or to the dullness of their intellectual faculties. Men of parts, penetration, and judgment, in other respects, often fall into it; while the plain, simple man keeps to the right way. It is not so much want of thought, as thinking in a wrong channel, which first occasions it. A very little compass of thought will suffice to convince any man of the difference between time and eternity; nor can any one so mistake in his judgment, as to think

think that the poor pittance of happiness to be enjoyed on earth, can deserve to be compared with the joys of heaven. It is only for want of serious reflection on the real nature of things, that men mistake their true felicity, and pursue a shadow and phantom to their own destruction. In order therefore to secure us from the prevalence of vicious self-love, the following considerations frequently recollected may be of important use.

First ; We should endeavour to fix in our minds this great and plain truth, that there can be no such thing as true happiness, separate from the love of God, and the love of our neighbour. This is a firm unalterable maxim, established on the very frame and constitution of things. To seek for happiness in any other way, is as absurd as to expect grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles. What happiness can any thinking man propose separate from God, the center of all happiness ? And if man be made a social creature, it is as vain for him to propose any separate independent happiness from the rest of his kind. Men are designed to live in concert, and to be happy, if
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at all, in the mutual friendship and enjoyment of each other. It is the law of their creation, the condition of their being; and therefore any pretended happiness, separate from the common good of mankind, is a meer dream and delusion, a contradiction to the reason and nature of things.

A second consideration is, that man is made for eternity, and not for this life only. No happiness can be true and solid, which is not durable as our natures. If the vicious man could secure the greatest worldly felicity, still it is confined within the circle of a few years, may die before him, and must however die with him, and leave him empty and destitute to all eternity.

To conclude: Those who have hitherto indulged a weak and vicious self-love, are not required, by what hath been said, to love themselves less, but only to love themselves more judiciously, and to better purpose; not to lay aside their concern for happiness, but to mix something more of discretion and judgment with it; that instead of pretending to be in any degree happy in opposition
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both to God and man, a thing utterly impossible, they may study and endeavour constantly to love God, and to love their neighbours, that is, all mankind; and then they will the most wisely, and the most effectually, “love their own selves.”

S E R M O N VII.

RELIGION THE ORNAMENT OF HUMAN NATURE.

PROV. i. 9.

They shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.

MANY excellent things are spoken of religion under the name of wisdom, in the book of Proverbs: its glory and riches, its beauty and blessedness, are here set forth in the clearest
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light; and the study and practice of it are enforced by the most convincing reason and affecting motives.

Yet it is matter of obvious complaint, that neither the dignity nor the amiableness of religion can effectually recommend it to the world: on the contrary, continual objections are starting up against it; and, notwithstanding the full conviction both of the truth and necessity of religion, we find it generally either evil spoken of, or evil thought of.

But among the many ill-grounded prejudices against it, there is scarce any so prevalent as the opinion of its sourness and severity. Men of spirit and politeness imagine piety to be an absurd and ill-natured contradiction to all the innocent and pleasurable freedoms of conversation; and that a man, as soon as he commences a good christian, is abandoned to formality and preciseness, to awkwardness of address and meanness of spirit, and must no longer expect to support the character of a gentleman.

It shall therefore be the business of this discourse to rescue religion from these
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imputations, and to prove it to be a graceful and an ornamental qualification.

Now in order to consider religion under this view, and to prove that it tends to refine as well as sanctify our behaviour; we must exclude all those fantastic notions of politeness, which are apt to dazzle the unthinking part of mankind, all the outward pomp of state and grandeur, and more especially, all those fashionable refinements of vice, which are as contradictory to common sense, as they are offensive to pure religion; and confine ourselves to such qualities, as the real and rational idea of politeness necessarily implies; such accomplishments, as may be called with the greatest truth, as they are in the text with the greatest elegance, “an ornament of grace unto the head, and chains about the neck.”

I shall accordingly consider the improvements which religion makes in the world, with respect to honour, good nature, and civility.

The high esteem in which honour is held by mankind, is evident from the constant and approved use of the word,

to express a man of worth : but we may without much difficulty perceive how unable it is to stand alone, and how much it requires the assistance of conscience to support and strengthen it.

Honour may thus be described : “ It
“ is that principle, which suggests to us
“ the performance of virtuous actions,
“ and the avoiding of vicious ones ;
“ founded upon notions of the inherent
“ and enobling excellency of the former,
“ and the base and degrading nature of
“ the latter.”

According to this definition it is a principle truly ingenuous and commendable ; but it takes virtue and vice only in one light, and therefore it must be of itself insufficient to preserve us steady in our duty ; because we find that all motives whatever are little enough to make us truly virtuous. Accordingly, when it stands single, it will be exceedingly narrow in its views ; and whatever shew it may make of its firmness and resolution, it will be but a weak and slender support to a man, who is violently attacked by worldly enjoyments or sufferings : where-

as a rightly informed conscience exhibits good and evil to us in every view ; sets the deformity of vice, in the strongest lights ; and urges us to the performance of our duty by the higher motives of divine favour and heavenly glory.

The general difference that is made between honour and conscience is, that the one relates to great, the other to good, actions ; but if we examine this difference more closely, we shall find it to be really nothing ; because there seems to be no acts of greatness, which are not likewise acts of goodness ; and one and the same definition may serve them both, namely, “ such acts as best suit the dignity of our being, and the nature of “ our several relations.” Conscience therefore, when regulated by religion, is, in this view, a principle of acting much superior to that of bare honour ; that it recommends virtue to our practice, under far stronger lights, and higher motives.

Again, the principle of honour is defective, because, without the support of conscience, it is apt to lead men into many errors.

If we consider the behaviour of those men, who have been esteemed men of meer honour, we shall very seldom find their characters good throughout. Honour is calculated for the eyes of men, and loves to shine forth in glaring acts of heroism, not in deeds of substantial virtue: as it now stands it is regulated rather by opinion than reason, is influenced more by a regard to popular opinions, than by sober judgment.

One man, for instance, imagines that nothing derogates from this principle so much, as inconstancy of mind and inconsistency of action; and therefore cherishes the spirit of stubbornness, and maintains at all adventures, whatever he hath once espoused. If his zeal be exercised in the cause of truth and virtue, it is his good fortune; he might as well have appeared in defence of the contrary. Now conscience here interposes to soften this obduracy of temper, and teaches us that there is as much glory in retracting an error, as in defending the truth; that though to stem the impetuous torrent of fashionable vices be true bravery, yet to fall in with the stream, when the stream flows

flows the right way, is no less honourable; and that there is but little credit in a man's being compared to a rock for his constancy, when the comparison will hold throughout, and include likewise his insensibility.

Again, we find that another man makes fashion the measure of his honour, and gives himself up entirely to the humours of the world. Now in this he acts by a very false rule; because what is really base and scandalous is frequently determined by the multitude to be generous and commendable; and on the contrary, things truly noble and praise-worthy, are often, in the current notions of the world, degraded into what is mean and contemptible. He acts likewise by a very uncertain rule, because, as the custom and fashion of the world is continually shifting, so upon these grounds his honour must be continually changing its direction. Conscience therefore is equally necessary here in order to cure that pliancy of temper, which flows to and fro with every tide of popularity, and to fix his methods

of acting upon the unchangeable foundation of truth and virtue.

Again, we often find that honour is a partial rule of acting, and that he who acts upon this principle rightly in one respect, will act notoriously against it in many others. Thus some, who would scorn to injure their neighbour either in property or reputation, would think it no diminution of their honour to injure him in a much more tender point, and look upon the violation of the most sacred ties, as a branch of that politeness on which they so highly value themselves.

But among the many instances to be met with, none are so seriously defended and deliberately transacted, as the gratifying an ungoverned lawless revenge in the practice of duelling, and the unnatural cowardice of self-murder.

The former of these is so professedly a part of a gentleman's character, that his honour is entirely lost, who will not be ready, on occasion, to engage in an act, that is not only offensive to the laws of God and man, but to reason and common sense. A slight affront is given, and the death of him who gave it shall be the
· satis-

fatisfaction. But is there any honour in revenge, and a thirst for blood? How far is such brutality removed from the divine generosity of “ answering injuries with kindness, and hatred with good-will?” Or if we take it in another view; we have received one injury, and are not contented with that; our adversary cannot acquit himself like a man of honour, if he will not endeavour to do us a much greater: he hath taken away our reputation, and we must give him a fair chance for our life too: the first injury was base and scandalous, but by doing a second he will make an ample and generous amends: this is the true language of duelling; a practice which might easily be shown to be as ridiculous and absurd, as it is impious.

The case of self-murder, upon any severe affliction, is either an insolent defiance, or a desperate distrust of God’s providence; as though the Almighty should not inflict upon us what punishment or terms of probation he thinks fit; or as though his providence could not free us from, or his grace support us under, any afflictions whatever. And how

far is all this removed from true honour? It is rashness, it is meanness of soul.

In all these cases, conscience is necessary to enlarge our views; to instruct us that every part of our duty is truly honourable, and therefore every part of it, upon the footing of honour, is to be performed.

Thus mere honour is liable to numerous failures, because it very much depends upon the humours of men: but conscience receives its measures of acting from the will of God, and is therefore a steady and uniform principle; it keeps its duty in constant view, resolutely perseveres in well-doing, and takes in the whole scope of virtue. Honour is apt to yield to hardships; conscience can surmount them all; and where mere honour will almost unavoidably be subdued, conscience will triumph over shame itself.

If we compare these principles with regard to the effects of them; what can honour propose, to place in competition with that brightness of truth and virtue, that generous sincerity, strict justice and disinterested mercy, which shine forth in the lives of truly pious christians?

ans? what instances of bravery like those which the noble army of martyrs have achieved? with what a superior sense of honour did they chearfully endure the trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, of imprisonments and deaths, for the sake of God and religion? They make our hearts burn within us, with holy emulation; the chains which they bore were chains of glory.

Secondly; Let us consider the improvements religion makes with respect to good-nature.

Now good-nature is rather a temper than a virtue; and he that is endued with it, is indebted more to his constitution than his own endeavours for it. It is indeed a very amiable quality, and covers a multitude of imperfections; but it is apt by itself to fall into great imperfections; and till it is strengthened by virtue, and improved into christian charity, we cannot conceive very highly of its excellency. When it is attended with a large fortune, it generally breaks out into abundant munificence and glaring acts of liberality, and degenerates into a principle of inconsiderate lavishment; it

scatters its favours, it knows not where, nor why; so that its acts of generosity are frequently made subservient to scandalous purposes, and the goodness of the disposition is destroyed by the baseness of its effects: in general, it must be irregular in its operations, because compliance is its business; it must be uncertain in its direction, because it is very apt to yield to present importunity. It is much more studious to gratify than to serve mankind, and by that means appears in many different shapes of weakness and extravagance.

That softness of temper, which will receive any impression; that indolence, which will admit of all encroachments; that profuseness, which flows out in every channel of excess; that jovial disposition, which falls in with all companies, and is ready to bear a part in every idle frolic or vicious intrigue, do all pass under the notion of good nature; which plainly shews, that the principle of mere good nature doth really require great management, in order to be kept within the bounds of discretion, reason, and virtue.

But charity rises from a variable temper into an uniform character. Charity
is

is diffusive without prodigality, and tender without fondness: it is bounded by nothing less than the universe, and it makes the love of ourselves the measure of our love towards all mankind; yet there is no danger of excess, because it is governed by christian prudence. It imitates the Almighty Benefactor of mankind in strength, purity, and sincerity of affection. Nothing therefore but beneficence can flow from it; and its beneficence streams forth in every instance of substantial service. So that however the principle of good-nature may be loved and applauded, yet it is no other than weakness, in comparison of the perfection of christian charity.

Let us now proceed to consider the influence of religion on the external behaviour, and observe how far it tends to promote courtesy and civility among men.

A graceful deportment is doubtless a great recommendation of a good temper of mind; but the spring of good behaviour must be within; religion must form the man, virtue must adorn his conversation. Now religion is decent and graceful in every action, virtue is comely and
engag-

engaging in every motion. But there are two christian duties which in a more especial manner contribute to refine and polish the manners of men, namely, meekness and humility. St. Peter exhorts us to be “cloathed with humility,” and speaks of “putting on the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit;” terms highly expressive of that grace and lustre, which these dispositions shed over the actions of men. And indeed if men would be as careful to possess their souls of these two virtues, as to form their bodies to the outward accomplishments of fashionable address, the world would abound much more in true politeness, and be freed from a great deal of insincerity. That complaisance and good breeding, which mankind is so fond of, is often an outward profession only, and is easily seen through, if it be not founded upon these virtues; it is put to many shifts to hide its hypocrisy; and seldom meets with any other than insincere returns for all its fashionable civilities. For men are quick-sighted enough, and will never esteem him truly polite, who is such in appearance only; who, to gain a point, or comply with
fashion,

fashion, will keep his mind and body upon the stretch to behave with decorum, and practise a few formal ceremonies; but who, if he be taken in an unguarded hour, or in a place where he does not think himself obliged to observe the niceties of behaviour, is peevish and ill-natured.

But the meek and humble christian is ever affable and condescending, open and free in his carriage; and procures that hearty friendship from others, which he is ever ready to express towards them. Humility makes a man perfectly easy in himself, and meekness renders him entirely agreeable to others; the cheerfulness of innocent mirth is the constant result of the former; a general love and esteem, of the latter. A man of these qualities “suffereth long and is kind, and
“is not easily provoked; he vaunteth
“not himself, is not puffed up, does not
“behave himself unseemly.” Thus he endears his friends to himself by obliging courtesy, and reconciles his enemies by
“forgiveness and forbearance in love.”

The modesty of deference to superiors;
the agreeableness of preferring our equals

in honour, and provoking them in love; the engaging methods of condescension to inferiors; the soft expressions of tenderness, which turn away wrath; the mild yieldings of meekness, which pacify great offences, cannot fail of creating true affection and endearment. They produce all the sweets of conversation, without the intermixture of those many piques and animosities, which a peevish, haughty behaviour never fails to raise and foment. These are the instances of true civility which are wanted in the world, and these are the natural and genuine effects of a meek and humble spirit.

Thus graceful and ornamental are the spirit and deportment which religion and christianity inculcate. And if we turn our eyes to the example of Christ, we shall see these lovely virtues displayed in all their lustre. What can be more deserving of the name of magnanimity and fortitude than his patient enduring the pains of the cross, his glorious contempt of the shame of it? What goodness of nature
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can bear any proportion to the love of Jesus, who went about doing good, even to his greatest enemies? Or who shall declare the glories of that meekness and humility with which he conversed with men in all the condescending forms of love and friendship?

Such was the life of our blessed master; and thus ought we to adorn our lives, if we would do justice to the gospel institution. Sullenness and severity of behaviour, are no parts of the christian character; we ought to shed over our religion all that lustre, which open honesty and good sense, which generous kindness and unaffected courtesy, can bestow to make it amiable. Goodness is never so engaging, as when it has cheerfulness for its ornament; and no charms are comparable to the refined graces of a rational and manly piety.

Let men of rank and fortune, then, aspire after the honours of the christian character, by the steady practice of every virtue. For true honour is not that which standeth in outward splendour, nor, that is measured by glaring
popu-

popularity: religion is the excellency of man, and virtue is his highest perfection.

Let those, the goodness of whose temper is inclined to overflow in acts of kindness, joyfully improve their natural disposition into a virtue, into the perfection of all virtues, christian charity. Good-nature tires by much exercise; generosity soon destroys its stock of bounty, and is unable to defray the expences of abundant munificence: but charity never fails; its funds are inexhaustible: the soul may forever delight itself in the riches of mercy.

Let those who labour to oblige the world, by appearing agreeable in conversation, and graceful in behaviour, learn to be, what they desire to seem to be, modest, courteous, meek, and humble. It is base and foolish to put on a disguise, when the true habit is so easily acquired. And who is there, who would not exchange the disgrace and uneasiness of dissimulation, for the real beauty and substantial comfort of the virtues themselves?

In short, let us all look up to religion for our accomplishments, and regulate
our

our behaviour by its precepts. Thus shall we obtain the approbation of men and the favour of God in this world; and those virtues, which are “an ornament of grace unto our heads” here, will become unto us “a crown of eternal glory” hereafter.



S E R M O N V I I I .

A REGARD TO THE GOOD OPINION
OF THE WORLD COMMENDABLE.

2 COR. viii. 21.

*Providing for honest things, not only in the
sight of the Lord, but also in the sight
of men.*

ALTHOUGH the first and principal thing to be regarded in all our actions, be to make them agreeable to the laws of God, and to keep a conscience void of offence towards him; yet
that

that a due regard ought to be paid to the opinions of men in our outward conduct, is a truth not to be disputed. The reason why the scriptures are more silent as to these sort of duties, seems to be not only because they are a kind of secondary duties, and to be estimated by the degree of use and subserviency they stand in to the higher duties of religious morality; but also, as they depend in a great measure upon the customs and circumstances of different times and places, they could not be so particularly treated of and inculcated, as the weightier precepts of christianity, which are always the same; but must be left chiefly to the discretion of mankind, to be regulated according to their different stations, and the various fashions and manners of the age wherein they live.

Our Saviour indeed has more than once cautioned his disciples in general terms against giving offence; and very wisely given the precept, "to let their
 "light so shine before men, that their
 "good works may be seen," a place in the noble lesson of morality he delivered from the Mount. But St. Paul has been more copious upon this head, not only
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in delivering some general precepts of this kind, but exemplifying them in his own conduct: who, as he had the care of planting christianity in the heathen world in a great measure committed to him, was obliged to be extremely circumspect, in having “his conversation
“honest among the Gentiles, that they
“by beholding his good works, might
“glorify God in the day of their visitation.” Hence is it that we find him, in the defence he made of himself against Tertullus, declaring, “That herein did
“he exercise himself, to have always a
“conscience void of offence, towards
“God, and towards men.” Hence is it that he advises the Philippians to think, among other things of the greatest moment, “of those things also which are of good report;” the Thessalonians, “to abstain from all appearance of evil;” the Romans, “to provide things honest in the sight of all men;” and in the words of the text, gives an instance of his own strict observance of this very precept.

The apostle at the beginning of the chapter exhorts the Corinthians, after the example of the churches of Macedonia, “to contribute to the necessities of the
“poor

“poor saints at Jerusalem:” and after shewing the reasonableness of the duty, and commending the forwardness they had expressed formerly in the discharge of it; he acquaints them at the sixteenth and following verses, “that Titus and the brother whose praise is in the gospel” (generally supposed to be St. Luke) were joined as assistants to him in the disposal of this charity. Now although it cannot be denied but St. Paul would have done an action highly acceptable to God in procuring this charity, had he left the management and distribution of it to others; and although there could not be the least room to suspect, that he would have imbezzled or perverted any of it to his own private use, if he had taken the disposal of it entirely into his own hands: yet considering the jealousies he might be exposed to from the malice and ill-will of his enemies, in the latter respect: and the danger of breeding contention among the brethren, in the former, if he had not interposed at all; he is as careful about the manner and circumstances of the distribution of the charity, as he was about the charity itself. He pitches
upon

upon one person, of undoubted reputation, and has another chosen by the churches to travel along with him; "that he might avoid this, that no man should blame him in the abundance which was administered by him." Thus we see, that as the apostle had provided what was "honest in the sight of the Lord," by promoting an action of all others the most acceptable to him, in relieving the first christian converts under great distress: so by his singular care and caution in the manner of conducting this charity, did he "provide, for honest things also in the sight of men;" by giving the fullest assurance that what was charitably collected, should be justly distributed among those for whom it was intended.

From this view of the apostle's meaning in the context, we are naturally led to enquire upon what grounds and reasons, and in what cases, we ought "to provide things honest in the sight of men."

And here it may not be amiss, in the first place, to enquire into the reason in general, why we are obliged to have any

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respect to the opinions of men, in the outward conduct of our actions. For, seeing that an omniscient God, the searcher of hearts, is the supreme judge of all our actions; and that by his judgment alone our final sentence, to happiness or misery, is to be irreversibly fixed; it may seem, perhaps, at first needless to trouble ourselves, or to be very anxious about what men may say or think of us; provided we have the testimony of a good conscience towards God, and are able to give a good account of our observance of his laws, whenever we are called upon to do it. This reasoning is certainly so far just and right, that we have not any real cause to fear what men may think or say of us, so long as our consciences will acquit us before God. But the fallacy of it lies here, that it will be impossible for us to stand clear at the bar of his judgment, if we are not very cautious in our behaviour whilst we continue in the sight of men upon earth. For it is always to be remembered, that it is our duty not only to observe the laws of christianity ourselves, but to discountenance vice, and folly, and irreligion, as much as it lies in
our

our power; and to encourage the increase of piety and virtue in all we converse with: and consequently, as often as by setting an ill example, or omitting to set a good one upon proper occasions, we encourage others to go on in their wickedness; so far do we, in the apostle's words, become "partakers of other men's sins," and liable to fall under the same condemnation. And this is the true and real foundation of every duty of this kind: which, when we consider how much men live by imitation, and how prevalent the force of example is, will appear to be of much greater consequence, than is generally apprehended. For if we look a little into the world, and study human nature; if we consider mankind, and the reasons why profaneness and immorality prevail so much amongst them; why happiness, which is the object of every one's pursuit, is the lot of few; I am persuaded, it is much oftener to be accounted for from the mistaken examples of other men, than the mistaken notions or reflections of our own minds. Some men may indeed have appeared in every age or country, who have lost them-

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selves

selves so far in abstruse speculation, as to lose sight of God and a sense of religion at the same time; and endeavour to persuade others, that the duties of religion and morality are creatures of the politician's framing, and no farther obligatory than the present necessities or occasional conveniencies of life make them so. But this is so repugnant to the general sense of mankind, and the nature of things, that these wild efforts of a deluded or over-heated fancy might easily be forgiven, were not their influence upon the practice too visible to be concealed. There is a principle in every man's breast, which makes him sensible of a certain difference between good and evil; and tells him of an infallible distinction between virtue and vice: and the checks which his conscience will never fail to give him upon any wicked action, and the occasional reproaches upon every serious reflection, after any guilt is contracted, are sufficient to destroy the force of all the arguments the mind can suggest in her own defence. But the misfortune is, that by seeing other men wicked, with all the outward marks of prosperity, we are drawn in, to imitate them in the present

sent gratification of some importunate desire; to over-rule the first admonitions of conscience, till it is by degrees lulled asleep, and till we are so far infatuated with the pleasure of sin, that we are desirous to excuse ourselves at any rate, and think of every argument to palliate our practice, rather than own ourselves in the wrong. Nay, so very dangerous is the force of evil examples, that it is not only sufficient to deface that natural shame, which is implanted in every one's breast, of being seen to do what is amiss; but it will often quite change the objects of it, and make men ashamed to own themselves as virtuous and good as they really are. It is an odd kind of hypocrisy indeed, to dissemble our virtue; and very strange it seems to be, that any one should be ashamed or want courage to own the influence that a sense of religion has upon his mind: but yet, it is not an uncommon thing to meet with some, among their vicious companions, boasting of wickedness they never committed; and others, wantonly presuming to blaspheme that God in public, whose presence in their retirements they tremble at the very

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thoughts of. Nay, it was long since observed by an excellent moralist, that one of the greatest causes of the corruption of men's manners was, that in their youth they had not usually courage enough to withstand the force of evil examples, and to resist intreaties.

Now as these considerations shew the mischiefs arising from a bad example; so by taking a view of the advantages arising from a good one; we shall be more fully convinced of the reasonableness of "providing things honest in the sight of men."

It was an observation of Plato, that if virtue could be presented in a bodily shape to human eyes, all mankind would be wonderfully enamoured of her. Could strength of reason, joined with great force of eloquence in the description of virtue, have rendered her quite amiable in the sight of men, that extraordinary philosopher would certainly have done it. But he was very sensible that reason and instruction, unassisted, and by themselves, are very dry and unfruitful; that eloquence might for a time please the imagination, and at the hearing touch the heart; but could seldom make impressi-
ons.

ons lasting enough to have a constant influence upon the practice. Hence it seems to be, that he wished to have virtue presented to our sight, that having her always in view, we might the more effectually be prevailed on to imitate her perfections. Now what he wished for, is in a great measure fulfilled in the example of every good man; and his observation so far verified, that even the most profligate cannot help having a secret love and veneration for a virtuous character, and in their hearts desire to possess it. Therefore, since it is natural to us all to pursue what we desire, and imitate those we love; the surest way to become virtuous ourselves, will be to choose for our companions those that are so: and the most effectual way to reclaim sinners from their iniquity and folly, is to begin at home, by setting a good example. For by this means we shall not only shew in real life what religion and virtue are, but at the same time prove, that they exceed not our strength to practise. By this means, so far shall we be from partaking of other men's sins, that we shall be entitled to the reward promised in scripture, for re-

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claiming.

claiming sinners from the evil of their way, and saving souls alive. These considerations shew the reasonableness of the duty of providing for "honest things in the sight of men;" and how extensive the influence of it has been always deemed to be over the general practice of men; and by consequence the great wisdom of Christ and his apostles, in giving this precept a place in the perfect lessons of morality they taught mankind.

But there are some particular cases, wherein we are obliged to be more than ordinarily careful to provide things honest in the sight of men: such are all the duties relating to the prosperity of that community whereof we are members: attending the publick worship of God; promoting acts of general beneficence, and publick charities; instructing the ignorant and poor; encouraging the industrious; maintaining the common peace; supporting the execution of justice, and bringing notorious offenders to condign punishment. All the social duties of this kind, are of that public nature, that a great part of the merit of them, arises from their being seen, and deserving the praise of men; and therefore

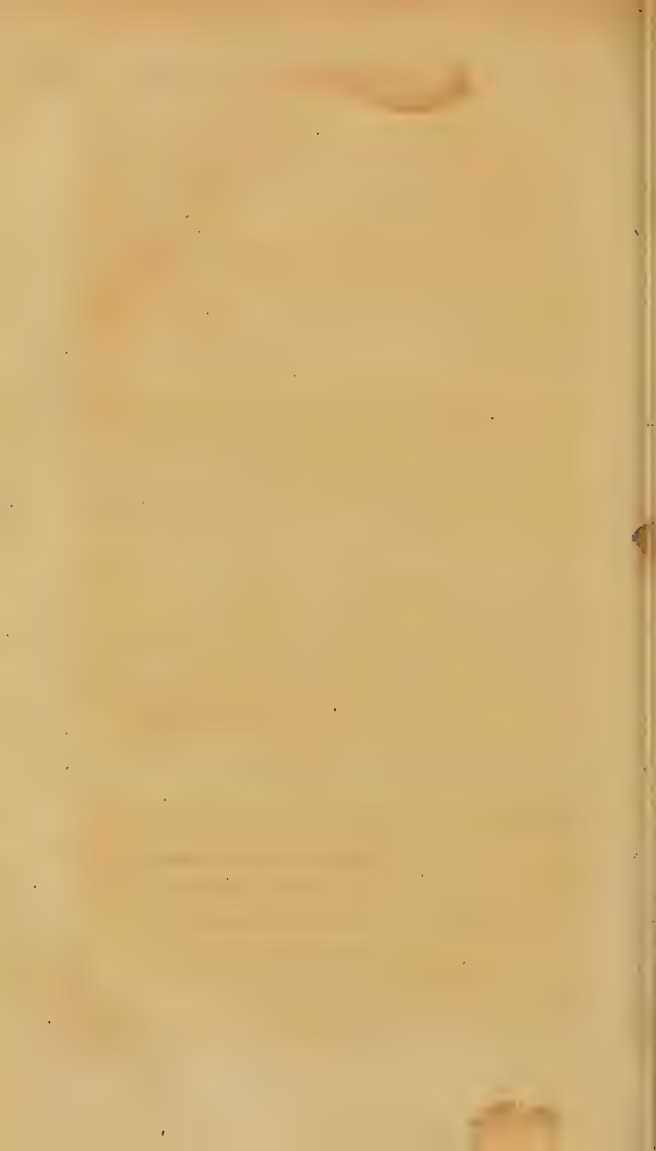
fore every one, in his proper station, and according to his ability, ought to be forward and exemplary in promoting the observance of them.

But may it not be objected, that this doctrine gives too much encouragement to ostentation and vain-glory? Does it not too much resemble that pharisaical righteousness, which is every where severely condemned and censured by our blessed Saviour? Nay, does he not, at the beginning of the sixth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, command the quite contrary; "to take heed not to do our
" alms before men, to be seen of them?
" Not to pray in the synagogues and
" corners of the streets," if we expect to be rewarded by our Father who is in heaven?—Undoubtedly he does; and that very consistently too with what he had himself before enjoined, and what St. Paul more fully and frequently insists on. For it is to be observed that the duties of prayer and alms-giving are both of a public and private nature, and that our behaviour therefore in the discharge of them, ought to be respectively regulated according to these different circumstances.

The truth of the matter is, that Christ never designed to discourage men from being open and exemplary in religion and virtue; or from appearing to the world as just, as generous, as charitable and good, as they really are. Himself and his apostles, "who went about doing good," have enforced by various precepts this practice, and expressly recommended their own examples to future imitation. But what our Lord so severely reprimands, is the making an ostentatious shew of our good deeds, signified by "sounding a trumpet before them when we do an alms," and affecting to appear devout and charitable in the sight of men, when we are not really and sincerely so: that we should not, with the scribes and pharisees, be like whited sepulchres; have fair outsides, and be at the same time "within full of rottenness and dead men's bones:" with austere looks, and the outward pomp and shew of piety, devotion and charity, have hearts at the same time full of nothing but "pride, extortion, and all manner of uncleanness." This vile hypocrisy is what our Saviour severely censures; and with very good reason assures those, who
only

only affected to be righteous in the sight of men, that they would not be entitled to any reward from their Father in heaven, who, being the searcher of hearts, cannot be unacquainted with their insincerity. But surely there can be no colour of reason from hence to conclude, that they who are sincere in their religion, who are truly and upon principle charitable and good, should be afraid of the same imputation of hypocrisy, because they appear so in the sight of men. Nay, both religion and reason require it as a duty in them to do so: out of regard to God, the searcher of hearts, to be really as good as they appear to be: and for the sake of men, to appear always as good as they really are.

Let us then, “provide things honest, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.”



S E R M O N IX.

THE DUTY OF PRAISE AND THANKS- GIVING.

PSALM L. 14.

Offer unto God thanksgiving.

THIS psalm was written on purpose to show the weakness and worthlessness of external performances, when compared with more substantial and vital duties. To enforce which doctrine, God himself is brought in, as delivering
it.

it. "Hear, O my people, and I will
"speak, O Israel, and I will testify a-
"gainst thee: I am God, even thy God."
The preface is very solemn; and there-
fore what it ushers in, we may be sure,
is of no common importance: "I will
"not reprove thee for thy sacrifices, or
"thy burnt-offerings, to have been con-
"tinually before me." That is, I will
not so reprove thee for any failures in
thy sacrifices and burnt-offerings, as if
these were the only, or the chief things
I required of thee. "I will take no
"bullock out of thy house, nor he-goat
"out of thy folds." I prescribed not
sacrifices to thee, for my own sake, be-
cause I needed them: "For every beast
"of the forest is mine, and the cattle
"upon a thousand hills." Mine they
are, and were, before ever I commanded
thee to offer them to me; so that (as it
follows) "if I were hungry, yet would
"I not tell thee; for the world is mine,
"and the fullness thereof." But can ye
be so gross and senseless, as to think me
liable to hunger and thirst? as to ima-
gine that wants of this kind can touch
me? "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or
drink the blood of goats?" Thus doth
he

he expostulate severely with them, after the most graceful manner of the eastern poetry. The issue of which is, a plain and full resolution of the case, in those few words of the text, "Offer unto God thanksgiving." Would you present your homage in the most agreeable way? would you render the most acceptable of services? "Offer unto God thanksgiving."

Which that we may do, let us enquire first, how we are to understand this command of offering praise and thanksgiving unto God; and then how reasonable it is that we should comply with it.

Our enquiry into what is meant here, will be very short. For, who is there, that understands any thing of religion, but knows, that the offering praise and thanks to God implies, our having a lively and devout sense of his excellencies, and of his benefits; our recollecting them with humility and thankfulness of heart; and our expressing these inward affections by suitable outward signs? This is the account, which every christian easily gives himself of it; and which, therefore, it would be needless to enlarge upon. I shall only observe, that praise and thanksgiving do, in strictness of speech, signify things

things somewhat different. Our praise properly terminates in God, on the account of his natural excellencies and perfections; and is that act of devotion by which we confess and admire his several attributes. But thanksgiving is more confined in its meaning, and imports only a grateful sense and acknowledgment of past mercies. We praise God for all his glorious acts, of every kind, that regard either us, or other men: but we thank him (properly speaking) for the instances of his goodness alone; and for such only of these, as we ourselves are some way concerned in. This, I say, is what the two words strictly imply: but since the language of scripture is generally less exact, and often useth either of them to express the other, I shall not think myself obliged, in what follows, thus nicely always to distinguish them.

Now the great reasonableness of this duty of praise or thanksgiving, and our several obligations to it, will appear, if we either consider it absolutely in itself, as the debt of our nature; or point out some of its peculiar properties and advantages, with regard to the devout performer of it.

First;

First; The duty of praise and thanksgiving, considered absolutely in itself, is the debt and law of our nature. We had such faculties bestowed on us by our Creator, as made us capable of discharging this debt, and obeying this law; and they never, therefore, work more naturally and freely, than when they are thus employed.

Reason is given us as a rule and measure, by the help of which we are to proportion our esteem of every thing, according to the degrees of perfection and goodness which we find therein. It cannot, therefore, if it doth its office at all, but apprehend God as the best and most perfect being; it must needs see, and own, and admire his infinite perfections. And this is what is strictly meant by praise; which, therefore, is expressed in scripture by confessing to God, and acknowledging him, and by ascribing to him what is his due: and, as far as this sense of the words reaches, it is impossible to think of God without praising him. For it depends not on the understanding how it shall apprehend things, any more than it doth on the eye,

eye, how visible objects shall appear to it.

The duty takes a farther and surer hold of us, by means of that strong bent towards gratitude which the author of our nature hath implanted in it. There is not a more active principle than this in the mind of man : and surely, that which deserves its utmost force, and should set all its springs in motion, is God ; the great and universal benefactor, from whom alone we received whatever we either have, or are, and to whom we can possibly repay nothing but our praises, or (to speak more properly on this head, and according to the strict import of the word) our thanksgiving.

Gratitude consists in an equal return of benefits, if we are able ; or of thanks, if we are not : our thanks, therefore, must rise always in proportion as the favours received are great, and the receiver incapable of making any other sort of requital. Now, since no man hath benefited God at any time, and yet every man, in each moment of his life, is continually benefited by him, what strong obligations must we needs be under to thank him ! It is true, our thanks
are

are really as insignificant to him, as any other kind of return would be ; in themselves indeed, they are worthless ; but his goodness hath put a value upon them : he hath declared, he will accept them in lieu of the vast debt we owe : and, after that, which is fittest for us, to dispute how they come to be taken as an equivalent, or to pay them ?

It is, therefore, the voice of nature (as far as gratitude itself is so) that the good things we receive from above, should be sent back again thither in thanks and praises, “ as the rivers run
“ into the sea ; to the place (the ocean
“ of beneficence) from whence the rivers
“ come, thither should they return a-
“ gain.”

Let us now take notice of some of the peculiar properties and advantages, of this duty which recommend it to the devout performer. And,

First ; It is the most pleasing part of our devotions. It proceeds always from a lively, chearful temper of mind ; and it cherishes and improves what it proceeds from. “ For it is good to sing praises unto our God,” (says one, whose experience, in this case, we may rely upon)

on) "it is pleasant, and praise is comely." Petition and confession are the language of the indigent and the guilty, the breathings of a sad and a contrite spirit. "Is any afflicted? let him pray:" but, "is any merry, let him sing psalms." The most usual and natural way of mens expressing the mirth of their hearts, is, in a song; and songs are the very language of praise; to the expressing of which they are in a peculiar manner appropriated, and are scarcely of any other use in religion. Indeed, the whole composition of this duty is such, as throughout speaks ease and delight to the mind: it proceeds from love, and from thankfulness; from love, the fountain of pleasure, the passion, which gives every thing we do, or enjoy, its relish and agreeableness; from thankfulness, which involves in it the memory of past benefits; the actual presence of them to the mind, and the repeated enjoyment of them. And as its principle is, such is its end also. For it procureth quiet and ease to the mind, by doing somewhat towards satisfying that debt which it labours under; by delivering it of those thoughts of praise and
gra-

gratitude, those exultations it is so full of; and which would grow uneasy and troublesome to it, if they were kept in. If the thankful refrained, it would be pain and grief to them:" But then "is their soul satisfied as with marrow and fatness, when their mouth praiseth God with joyful lips."

It is another distinguishing property of divine praise, that it enlargeth the powers and capacities of our souls; turning them from little and low things, upon their greatest and noblest objects, the divine nature; and employing them in the discovery and admiration of the several perfections that adorn it. We see, what difference there is between man and man; such, as there is hardly greater between man and beast: and this proceeds chiefly from the different sphere of thought in which they act, and the different objects with which they converse. The mind is essentially the same in the peasant and the prince; the forces of it naturally equal in the untaught man, and the philosopher: only the one of these is busied in meaner affairs, and within narrower bounds, the other exercises himself in things of weight and moment; and

and this it is that puts the wide distance between them. Noble objects are to the mind, what the sun-beams are to a bud or flower ; they open and unfold, as it were, the leaves of it ; put it upon exerting and spreading itself every way ; and call forth all those powers, that lie hid and locked up in it. The praise and admiration of God, therefore, brings this advantage along with it, that it sets our faculties upon their full stretch, and improves them to all the degrees of perfection, of which they are capable.

It, farther, promotes in us an exquisite sense of God's honour, and an high indignation of mind at every thing that openly profanes it. For, what we value and delight in, we cannot with patience hear slighted, or abused. Our own praises, which we are constantly putting up, will be a spur to us towards procuring and promoting the divine glory in every other instance ; and will make us set our faces against all open and avowed impieties. Which, methinks, should be considered a little by such as would be thought not to be wanting in this duty, and yet are often
silent

silent under the greatest dishonours done to religion, and its divine author. For shamefully to hear God's name and worship vilified by others, is no very good argument, that we have been used to honour and reverence him in good earnest, ourselves.

Finally ; It will, beyond all this, work in us a deep humility, and consciousness of our own imperfections. Upon a frequent attention to God and his attributes, we shall easily discover our own weakness and emptiness ; our swelling thoughts of ourselves will abate, and we shall see and feel, that we “ are altogether lighter to be laid in the balance, than vanity.” And this is a lesson, which, to the greatest part of mankind, is, I think, very well worth learning. We are naturally presumptuous and vain ; full of ourselves, and regardless of every thing besides : especially, when some little outward privileges distinguish us from the rest of mankind ; then, it is no uncommon thing for us to look into ourselves with great degrees of complacency ; then “ we are wiser (and better every way) in our own conceit, than seven men, that can render a reason.” Now nothing will contri-

contribute so much to the cure of this vanity, as a due attention to God's excellencies, and perfections: by comparing these with those which, we imagine, belong to us, we shall learn, "not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but to think soberly." We shall find more satisfaction in looking upwards, and humbling ourselves before our common Creator, than in casting our eyes downwards with scorn upon our fellow-creatures, and setting at nought any part of the work of his hands. The vast distance we are at from infinite excellence will astonish us so much, that we shall not be tempted to value ourselves upon those lesser degrees of pre-eminence, which custom, or opinion, or some little accidental advantages have given us over other men.

Upon these grounds doth the duty of praise stand, and these are the obligations that bind us to the performance of it.

I shall now shut up this discourse, with a short application to two sorts of persons; the careless, and the profane; one of whom neglects the practice of so
important

important a duty, the other lives in an open defiance of it.

A neglect in this case, doth certainly involve in it a very high degree of guilt and folly : for it is, we see, at once the neglect of our duty, and honour, our interest, and our pleasure. It is to omit doing that, which we have many obligations to do, and no excuse for leaving undone ; since praise is within every man's reach ; there is no one but hath it in his power to be thankful.

God commanded the Jews to acknowledge his sovereignty and beneficence, by sacrifices ; a costly and a troublesome way of worship. Of us he requires only the cheap and easy offering of our thanks and praises. And shall we not pay it ? Alas ! we do not ! Every thing proves a hindrance to us in the way to this our bounden duty and service : we are too idle, or too busy to attend upon it. And even when we find leisure enough ; yet how cold and how insensible are we, whilst it is performing ! “ We draw
“ nigh unto him with our mouths, and
“ honour him with our lips ; but our
“ hearts are far from him.” And do we then know, what it is to praise
I God

God becomingly? Do we remember, how the great pattern of religious gratitude summons up every one of his faculties to assist him in it? “Bless the
“Lord, O my soul! and all that is
“within thee, bless his holy name!” It is a work that will employ all that is within us, will call for all the application, and vigour, and warmth, that we can possibly bestow upon it. Cold and languid praise is no praise; this sacrifice can be no longer acceptable than it is burning.

To those men, who live in the contempt of this duty, we have also somewhat to say, if they would but hear us. They are generally such, as pretend to a high sense of the dignity of human nature, and bear no small respect to their own understandings. Now, though other parts of religious worship should happen to be too mean and low for such great minds to take up with; yet this, methinks, might deserve to be thought equal to them. Suppose that confession prayer were as much beneath them as they imagine; yet surely, praise hath somewhat in it so great, and so noble,

ble, as may invite them to practise it. It is a subject, fit for the most enlarged capacities to dwell upon; an exercise by which they would certainly find themselves raised and improved.

If it were possible for these men to have a relish of any thing of this kind, we would desire them to make the trial. But alas! we speak in vain! The men, who are bold enough to slight a duty of this rank and character, will easily slight every thing that can be offered to persuade them to it.

That we may not fall into this impiety; let us "offer unto God thanksgiving;" and not that only, but ourselves also, "our souls and bodies, to be a "reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice." Let us render him the fruit of our lips, and the obedience of our lives. And may God of his great mercy accept the offering!

S E R M O N X.

THE CHRISTIAN RULE OF EQUITY
EXPLAINED AND ENFORCED.

MATT. vii. 12.

*All things whatsoever ye would that men
should do to you, do ye even so to them.*

MY text is one branch of doctrine
in our blessed Saviour's sermon on
the mount; and well deserves the place
it hath in that divine discourse; for it is

the first and clearest principle in the science of morality or common honesty; nay, in this single precept all the lines of right, or duty towards our neighbour center. It doth indeed so far comprize whatever God has taught us to do to one another by the light of reason, his laws or his prophets, that if all the offices of social life, that are dispersed throughout moral or sacred writers, were to be included in one full and common practical rule; it cannot be done in fewer words, and more comprehensive than those of the text.

I shall, at this time, attempt to explain the meaning, and determine the just extent of this precept; to illustrate its reasonableness and equity; and to enumerate the principal advantages which will result from the observance of it.

The words of this precept are plain and intelligible: and the doctrine contained in them would be so likewise, were but common sense, and natural conscience, to determine every doubt without sophistry or prejudice. For this single caution or restraint seems to be sufficient: let but the nature of things, as to what is just and right, fit and reasonable,

able, govern our own desires and actions ; then let us place every other person in our own stead : and we shall not transgress our duty to him. Thus we shall never grant either too little, or too much : since our own reason, when unbiaſſed, will always hinder us from ſinful or extravagant compliances : whiſt ſelf-love will prevent us from doing to another, what in our own turn we ſhould be loth to ſuffer. Let us but impartially conſider what treatment we may in any circumſtances of life fairly and juſtly expect from others : and we ſhall act moſt rightly, ſo long as we make our own fair and juſt expectations the ſtandard of our behaviour towards them ; ſo that no other paraphraſe on the text is neceſſary, than this. “ What things ſoever, when done
 “ by others to you, your own judgment
 “ ſhall without corruption, partiality, or
 “ hypocriſy commend, as done well and
 “ wiſely, go, and do likewise ; and God
 “ and man will juſtify you.”

Some caſes indeed may offer, wherein we ought not to comply with others, even though we ourſelves might perhaps in the ſame circumſtances deſire the like compliance ; but the reaſon is, becauſe

such a compliance would be a folly or a sin both in us and them. For instance, ought a person of a generous or charitable spirit, on pretence of being governed by this rule, to gratify those who ask such favours, as they in no wise merit, nor he can in reason grant; though conscious that he himself might be so weak, as to make requests not less extravagant, were he the petitioner? No certainly.

For the same reason, a jury is not at liberty to acquit, nor a judge to pardon desperate, incorrigible offenders, because were they themselves such, they should certainly desire to escape unpunished. As magistrates are the ministers of God, they are bound in duty to him, to their country, and the innocent sufferer, not to bear the sword in vain, but to execute strict justice, when there is in reason no room for mercy. Not to say, but that the most hardened criminal would think so, were he innocent himself: nay, though he be guilty, he seldom fails to approve, even so far, the righteousness of his sentence, and of its execution; that though the love of life, and the dread of death prompt him to procure an acquittal, reprieve, or pardon, yet
his

his own conscience tells him, at the same time, that he deserves none of them. Now these instances well understood will direct every man's private judgment, as circumstances arise, to determine without a casuist any other of the like nature; so that I may now proceed,

To settle the just extent and boundaries of the precept of the text. The terms of it are universal, and unlimited both as to things and persons: and reason and scripture will extend the meaning of them to the whole compass of our duty towards others; so as to take in not only all matters of justice and equity in trade and business, but of charity, generosity, and even civility in company and conversation. In matters of justice the case is clear: nor could any man have a doubt, whether he ought to be charitable, generous, and civil to others in every thing, that can proceed from compassion, affability, condescension, and good-nature; if he would reflect within himself how kindly, sincerely, respectfully and obligingly he hopes to be treated by them. He must be a stranger to a haughty and contemptuous deportment towards others,

who feels that nothing can be more provoking to himself, than a slighting or insolent behaviour, whether in looks or gesture, in words or actions. He who will consult his own breast for the price of a good name, will never want the tenderness he ought to have for the reputation of his neighbour. He who is thoroughly sensible of his own offences through ignorance, mistake or passion, will need no other motive to the practice of that wisdom and charity, which is not easily provoked, which suffereth long and is kind, which is peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, which is not only forbearing and forgiving, and without partiality, but full of mercy and good fruits. I may also add, that whoever will bring himself to sympathize with the poor, the needy and afflicted, will have the strongest inducements from within himself to do good to them that are without, as he has opportunity and ability. He will indeed feel the force, as well as perceive the truth of what our Saviour said, "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

In short, all men, in whatever stations, conditions or circumstances Providence

dence may place them, stand hereby obliged not only to give one another what is due in reason and conscience, but in good nature or good manners; because there is no one but must think, he hath a fair claim and title to such treatment from others. Which leads me,

To enquire into the general reason, and equity of the moral rule in my text. It carries indeed its own light along with it, which makes the equity of it so visible, as to need no evidence, and scarcely an illustration. All men must agree to it in speculation, however they may be biassed, and tempted to break through it in practice. No one can except against it, without first denying, that men have one nature common to them all, derived from God the Father of all, through one, and the same stock and lineage, wherein we stand equally related. Others being altogether such as ourselves, must have by the laws of that nature, whether of reason or humanity, an equal claim to the same dues, rights, kindnesses or civilities, as we expect from them.

“Thou shalt not have (saith Moses) in
 “thy bag, or in thy house divers weights:
 “and measures, a great and a small (one

“wherewith to sell, and another where-
 “with to buy) but thou shalt have a
 “perfect and a just weight: a perfect
 “and just measure shalt thou have.”
 There must, as in mercantile traffic, so
 in the social commerce of human life be
 one common, and fixt standard of deal-
 ing; there must be a perfect weight,
 and a just measure whereby to weigh
 and measure every part of our moral
 conduct towards each other. And what
 better, or indeed what other can we have,
 than the standard in my text, which is
 the compendium and substance of all
 equity; the doing in all cases and to all
 persons, what we ourselves in reason de-
 sire that they, if in our places and rela-
 tions, should do to us? for being all
 partakers of the same nature, what rela-
 tion one man in any case bears to ano-
 ther; the same that other, if put into
 like circumstances, will bear to him.
 Whatever is fit for, or due to one, must
 for the same reason be fit for, and due
 to another. What is good for one,
 must be equally good for another in the
 same condition; as what is evil for one,
 must be so for the other also. And con-
 sequently the reason of the thing being
 equal,

equal, there must be an unalterable obligation upon all men to do that right or good, and abstain from that injury or evil, which they in a like case would approve or condemn, if done by others to themselves, with regard to their life, estate, or reputation. The equity of this rule, is indeed so self evident and convincing, that no man can ever deviate from it, without transgressing both the plain law of his being, and acting against the judgment of his own mind, and the natural inclination of his own uncorrupted affections.

But to engage you more strongly to do to others whatsoever ye would that they should do to you; I shall proceed to shew the peculiar advantages belonging to this rule of moral action: and how much the welfare of mankind would be promoted by a constant and universal regard to it. And here I cannot but observe first, that it is a rule, which since all men ought to use, God hath suited it equally to the capacities of all, nay, contrived to have it ready on all occasions, so that we need go no further for its instructions, than to our own breasts. It is both self-evident, and self-applicable:

ble: so that an honest, and well-meaning man may determine no less rightly by it, than the most discerning and upright judge. For none, but fools or madmen, can be so weak as not to know, what usage they themselves expect and desire at the hands of others. Every one can look into his own heart: and that will clearly answer this plain question: Should I myself be content to be thus dealt with by another: if not, why should I deal so with him? Imagine the point in question to be as nice and difficult as possible: yet, let a man but make the case really his own, and he will scarcely ever judge or act amiss.

But here it may be asked, how are the measures of righteous dealing more clearly discovered by this imaginary change of rights and persons? for when the change is made, and we ourselves placed in the condition, and circumstances of other men; must we not have a sound and extensive judgment to discern what is fit, or right, or reasonable to be done by and to ourselves, as well as by and to them? but this judgment we cannot have, without a thorough in-
sight

fight into the moral nature and relations of things. And therefore, of what more extraordinary value or use is the rule of the text, than a plain command for our doing to all men, whatever is fit, right, and reasonable?

Now it is without question true, that the text includes nothing more uncommon, or surprising in its doctrine, than that we should hurt no one by word or deed, but be true, just and charitable in all our dealings. But then the principles of moral good and evil are so very clear, if not self-evident, that a man of the meanest understanding, seldom mistakes about what is right, or wrong in theory; but when we come to practice, self-love and interest are apt to put a bias upon our judgment. The difficulty then is how to remove ourselves as parties out of any question. Now this may be done by looking upon every man, as a second self; and then supposing his cause to be our own, or that we are to be so dealt with, as we deal with him; for then the very selfish principles within us become of real use, making us extremely cautious, (even whilst we have the power of weighing our own right and interests

rests as well as his) how we put too much into one scale, for fear it should be our lot, after his chusing as he ought, to have too little in the other. And thus this change of places and circumstances constitutes us, what we should in reason be even in our own cases, impartial judges, without passion, prejudice, or favour. We thus become equally interested and biaſſed in another man's cause as in our own: and as we are quick-sighted enough to discern our own rightful claims, the same sagacity will prevent our mistaking his; whilst conscience all the while suggests to us, that to do any thing to others, which we would not have done unto ourselves, is so scandalous an iniquity, or so false a balance, as to be an abomination both to God and man.

Nor is this the only good effect, which the precept of the text will have upon our practice; for it will be not only a rule, but a motive to our duty, always exciting us to perform what it enjoins. It will influence the will and passions, as well as correct the judgment, and determine us to do, as we would be done unto, by the forcible impulse of self-love. We shall

shall thereby be as strongly, and as quickly inclined to do good, and to abstain from injuries, in others, as with respect to ourselves; for by this change of circumstances we create within our breasts a sense and fellow-feeling of their happiness or misery; and thus become as ready and desirous to remove the one and increase the other, as we should be, were our own happiness or misery concerned. In one word, we shall at all times, and on all occasions, do, as much as lieth in us, to make the life of every one as easy and happy, as we should wish our own in their circumstances to be.

But lastly; The excellency of this precept will appear in the clearest light, if we shew how much it will, if conscientiously and universally observed, promote the welfare of mankind, both in their public and private relations.

As to what concerns the public; were kings and all that are in authority, after the example of Severus, one of the best and wisest of the Roman emperors, to inscribe this precept in letters of gold, over the gates of their palaces; and to make it the invariable standard of their political conduct; they would then never,

ver fail to govern, as they would be governed. Would they consider that liberty, life and property must be as dear to others as prerogative and power are to themselves; and then feign in imagination what their fellow-creatures must really suffer from any injuries herein, their own hearts would plead so strongly for their doing as they would be done unto, as to keep them not only from enslaving, destroying or plundering their subjects, to serve any schemes of avarice, ambition or tyranny; but likewise from offering to any of them, the least private hardship, that may not be justified by public good.

On the other hand, were subjects in their several stations to act from principles of religion and conscience, according to this christian rule of moral practice, which alters not with any party, not tends to any selfish views; they would, I am persuaded, be never wanting through envy, ambition, or unreasonable jealousies, in a chearful obedience to such higher powers as are no less watchful over the rights and interests of the people, than over their own privileges and dignities.

Would

Would all the members of civil society bring their several transactions with one another to this unerring test, there would be no complaining in our streets; for then the life and property of every man would be as safe in his neighbour's keeping as his own. We should then have nothing to fear from censoriousness, calumny and distraction, for we should be sure, that all we converse with would treat our reputation with the same good nature as their own; and with equal concern and candor either conceal or palliate our errors, or our faults. Were the secret springs of action in every human soul moved and directed by this principle of doing nothing to others but what they would have done unto themselves; anger, envy, hatred, malice and revenge would find no harbour in our bosoms, because we should thus feel, how unreasonable, and unjust it would be to indulge these passions, which we cannot but condemn in others, and of whose attacks we have the acutest resentment, when they are made upon ourselves. Would all men make conscience of buying and selling by this rule, all the arts of knavery and extortion would be at an end,

end, and no man would go beyond or defraud his brother in any matter.

Could they who are rich in this world be induced to do to others all things whatsoever they would have others to do to themselves, they would then need no charge to be rich in good works: they would be as ready to distribute and willing to communicate, as the poor to ask or receive.

To conclude, were this single christian precept religiously and universally observed, in such a constant intercourse of just and good offices as it will dictate to all who are united in the common bonds of humanity; it would make them all as happy as it is possible for men to be in this state of imperfection, and frailty. Every man would thus become a friend, a benefactor, a good angel, unto his fellow creatures; none of whom would be unhappy, if it were in human power to make them otherwise. This world would become a paradise, full of good fruits. Mercy and truth would every where meet together, and righteousness and peace would kiss each other. Our happiness on earth would only be exceeded by that of heaven, where there

there shall be no more sickness or pain ; from whence all pride, vain-glory, envy, hatred and malice, with all uncharitableness, shall be forever banished, and where we shall all be of one mind and one soul, and take equal delight in the common felicity of our fellow-creatures as in our own.

To which happy state may God of his mercy and goodness bring us all !



S E R M O N X I.

THE CHARACTER OF THE RIGHTEOUS,
AND THE GOOD MAN COMPARED.

ROM. v. 7.

*Scarcely for a righteous man will one die,
yet, peradventure, for a good man some
would even dare to die.*

I N the verse preceding the text, the apostle mentions that great instance of the love of God, in sending his son into the world to die for us, which is the peculiar

peculiar discovery of the gospel, and deserves our highest admiration and gratitude; “for when we were yet
 “without strength, in due time Christ
 “died for the ungodly.” The goodness of God, in this wonderful constitution, is celebrated, in the new Testament, with the most lofty encomiums. There is an uncommon stress and emphasis laid upon it; “God so loved the world, that he gave his son Jesus Christ to be a propitiation for our sins.” It vastly surpasses the most noble and heroic instances of human benevolence and friendship. For, amongst men, there is scarcely one to be met with, that will die for a person who is strictly just and righteous; and it is very rare and extraordinary to find any that will lay down their lives for a charitable beneficent man: “peradventure for a good
 “man some would even dare to die;
 “but God commendeth his love towards
 “us, in that while we were yet sinners,
 “Christ died for us.” This is the immediate connection of the words; which I shall consider, in what follows, as an independent proposition: and, grounding my discourse entirely on the observation
 St,

St. Paul has made, that mankind have a much greater esteem of kind and generous, than of merely just actions, shall endeavour to shew, that this is not owing to education, fancy, and enthusiasm, but founded on right reason, and a true judgment of the intrinsic nature and differences of things. In order to this, I shall give a short sketch of the characters of the righteous and good man; shew the vastly superior excellency of the latter; and, make some reflections on the whole.

If it be asked, on what grounds we distinguish between a righteous and good man; whether a man can in any sense be strictly just that is not good; and whether good offices are not *due* to our fellow-creatures; I answer, that those who are in distress have, unquestionably, a right to be relieved, founded on reason, on common ties of humanity, and the mutual dependence of mankind upon one another. This right, however, is only general. It does not, in most cases, give them a claim to assistance and support from any particular persons; but men are at liberty to chuse the objects towards whom to exercise their charity, as their

own judgment and prudence direct, and he that is neglected may have no reason to complain of a real injury done him. Whereas justice is an immediate demand that one man has upon another. It is a demand of something fixed and certain; which is not the case in acts of charity, the fitness of which, with respect to particular persons, and consequently our claims from them, depend on a variety of circumstances that cannot always be adjusted, and very often, perhaps, are not proper to be known. So that though he who has it in his power to do many services for his fellow-creatures, which his circumstances and station in life plainly direct to, but neglects to perform them, either through indolence, or an hard unrelenting insensible temper; though such a one, I say, may in a more general sense be said to be unjust, because he does not that good which the necessities of others call for, and which may fairly be expected from him; yet it appears, from what has been said, that there is some ground for the distinction made, in the text, between the righteous and good man, and we shall be able the more easily to delineate their respective characters.

The

The just man, then, punctually answers all the particular demands that can be made upon him, and renders unto every man what he can exactly and precisely prove to be his due ; not upon a general right of claim in which others are equally concerned, but due immediately from himself. He is fair and honest in his dealings, true to his promises, nor does any man a direct injury. He will neither defame and blacken his reputation, nor oppress him by open violence, nor circumvent and deceive him by secret fraud. He will not abuse the confidence that is reposed in him, nor take advantage of his neighbour's ignorance to do him a prejudice. And as he is careful to do to others every thing that, in strict equity, he is obliged to do, he rigorously insists on his due from them ; and if he cannot be charged with downright injustice, imagines that this is all that can be expected from him, and concerns himself about nothing farther. I have stated the matter thus, because if I should suppose him to recede from his strict right, and make favourable abatements and allowances, it would confound his character with that of the beneficent

or generous man, from which, the apostle's argument, in the text, requires it should be kept entirely distinct.

But now the good man goes far beyond this. He makes the interest of mankind, in a manner, his own, and has a tender and affectionate concern for their welfare. He cannot think himself happy, whatever his possessions and enjoyments are, while he sees others miserable. His wealth and affluence delight him chiefly as the poor and indigent are the better for it; and the greatest charm of prosperity is the opportunity it affords of relieving his fellow-creatures, and being more extensively useful. He thinks he has discharged but the least part of his duty, when he has done strict justice to all; and therefore the communicating advice and comfort, assistance and support, according to the various exigencies of those with whom he converses, is his constant endeavour, and most pleasing entertainment. In the strong and elegant language of Job, he is “eyes to the
“blind, and feet to the lame, he deli-
“vereth the poor that cry, and the fa-
“therless, and him that hath none to
“help him; the blessing of him that is
“ready.

“ ready to perish cometh upon him, and
 “ he causeth the widow’s heart to sing
 “ for joy.” And that he may practice
 the more large and generous charity, he
 retrenches useless pomp and extrava-
 gance, and by a regular and prudent
 management, constantly provides for the
 relief of the necessitous ; esteeming this
 a much more sublime and noble gratifi-
 cation, than the idle amusements and
 gallantries of a vain and luxurious age.
 “ A good man,” saith the Psalmist,
 “ sheweth favour and lendeth ; he will
 “ guide his affairs with discretion.”

Again, he not only takes all occasi-
 ons, that present themselves, of doing
 good, but seeks for opportunities to be
 useful ; it is part of the stated employ-
 ment and business of his life. He con-
 trives and studies which way he may be
 most serviceable to his fellow-creatures,
 and what that particular talent is, with
 which he is entrusted for the good of
 mankind. If it be power, he protects
 and encourages virtue by his authority
 and influence, is the patron of liberty,
 and vindicates the cause of oppressed in-
 nocence : if riches, he is “ rich in good
 “ works, ready to distribute, willing to

“communicate:” if knowledge, he esteems it his highest pleasure to instruct the ignorant, and administer proper direction and comfort in perplexing and difficult circumstances, and to defend the cause of religion, and represent it in a just and amiable light. And to nothing of this does he want to be solicited, but his generous heart is always ready, and strongly disposed for beneficent designs and actions. You cannot lay a greater obligation upon him than by proposing ways in which he may be useful, or enlarge his sphere of usefulness: for this is the point in which all his views, all his desires, all his satisfactions, center.

Add to this, that he is inclined to abate of his right, when insisting too strictly upon it may have the appearance of harshness and severity; and has such a strong sense of benevolence, such an exalted spirit of humanity and compassion, as no considerations of private interest, no difference of nation or religious profession can restrain; and the greatest injuries cannot bear down and extinguish. He aims that his goodness may be as diffusive as possible, and as much like that of the universal parent,
the

the supreme and eternal fountain of good, who supports, enlivens, and recreates the whole creation; and therefore, as he is generous in all his designs, he is very fearful of disobliging any, either by word, or action, and endeavours, in the whole of his conduct, to be agreeable as well as useful to all; being candid in his censures, practising to his inferiors the most endearing condescension, and carefully avoiding moroseness, and every thing that has the appearance of insolence and contempt. Finally, that I may conclude the sketch, which I designed, of this most beautiful and honourable character, the good man is unwearied in his endeavours to promote the happiness of others; the ardour of his benevolence is not cooled, though he meets with ungrateful returns; the trouble and expence of the service do not discourage him; nay, he is ready to give up all private considerations for the sake of the public welfare, and even to sacrifice life itself, when the good of the world requires it. Such are the distinct characters of the just, and the righteous man: I proceed now,

To shew the superior excellency of the former above the latter.

And first, the character of the good man is much more amiable in itself. Justice indeed, so far as it goes, is not only an irreproveable character, but rational and becoming; but no man will say that it has any thing great and generous in it, because it is, indeed, the least degree of virtue that can be supposed in social life. It is approved of, but not admired: we do not think ourselves obliged to the person that does it, since it is, really, as little as he can do for us, justice being what all have an undoubted right to claim. And therefore there is properly no merit in it, nothing that exalts and dignifies a character, because it is expected from all who have any notion of good and evil, and are not quite lost to virtue.

But benevolence, disinterested, generous, diffusive benevolence, is the highest perfection and glory of human nature. It argues true greatness of mind, and is a virtue that men of mean and narrow spirits cannot practise. It is not only a right, but a beautiful character, that charms the beholders, and attracts universal

versal esteem and love. Even the most dissolute and profligate cannot help being struck with it in others, however they may neglect to excel in it themselves. And the finest and most shining qualities, the most excellent endowments of nature, and highest improvements of art, are low and despicable in comparison of it, and derive all their lustre from it. Without it, riches are insolent and arbitrary; power is oppressive and tyrannical; and wisdom mischievous craft and subtilty, or, at best, vain and useless ostentation. I appeal to the reason of mankind, whether if any one was to form the most lovely and amiable, and at the same time the greatest and most heroic character he could possibly devise, it would not be that of the generous and faithful friend, the liberal compassionate benefactor, the disinterested and noble-minded patriot, who diffuses relief, comfort, and happiness all around him; is enlarged beyond mean and selfish views; and considers himself, as a member of the grand community of mankind, born for the general good.

Again, the superior excellence of goodness to justice is evident from hence, that

the latter is necessarily included in the former, as the less in the greater. Without benevolence, justice, instead of being a finished, is a very defective character; nay it forms, upon the whole a bad character, a little, narrow, selfish character, that is justly the object of contempt. This will be more fully illustrated by applying it to the supreme being, whom if we suppose to be only just, and not absolutely and universally benevolent and merciful, we entirely destroy the foundation of those exalted, honourable, and lovely conceptions of him, which wise and thinking men, in all ages, have entertained. But his goodness, his unlimited goodness, which is so gloriously displayed in the frame of our own nature, in the whole constitution of things, and the whole course of providence, renders him the worthy object of our trust and confidence, and of our supreme love and delight.

Farther; As the good man's character is much more lovely in itself, so is it more useful than that of the merely righteous or just man. By justice men's property is, indeed, in a good measure secured, and injury and violence,
and

and consequently much confusion and mischief in the world, are prevented; but the greatest part of the true enjoyments of life, of the conveniencies and comforts of it, arise from benevolence. Without justice, societies could not subsist; but without benevolence, if they might possibly subsist (which can hardly be imagined) they would infallible be miserable. Mankind are formed for society, and, by means of their large and extensive capacities, may be exceedingly useful to each other; but if one were to do for another no more than he could strictly claim, very little good would actually be done, and thus the design of their social nature must be defeated, and their present being be extremely uncomfortable. For if the man that is only just, the utmost that can, generally, be said of him is, that he is not a mischievous creature; but he may be insignificant, a kind of blank in the creation: he does no wrong or injury to any; but then he contributes very little to the positive happiness of the world. It is generous friendship, the tender sympathising temper, the open and liberal heart, that make pleasure circulate, and alleviate the cares of life.

And did men, universally, study how to be useful, and practise beneficence in its greatest latitude; were their interests considered as dependent upon, and inseparably connected with, each other; and a constant intercourse of good offices maintained among all who are united in the common bonds of humanity; the face of things would be altered unspeakably for the better, and the world would be as happy, as the imperfection and frailty, and many unavoidable casualties of the present state will admit of. But mere justice cannot introduce any thing like this desirable and delightful scene; and, consequently, is vastly inferior, in respect of real advantage to mankind, to the exercise of benevolence, to which, partial and limited as it is, the far greater part of the happiness that is in the world is undeniably owing.

I add; The good man's character is not only more useful than that of the just man, but its influence is abundantly more extensive. In matters wherein active justice is concerned, men are, generally, confined to a narrow circle. With regard to those, with whom they have no dealings of commerce, their
justice

justice amounts to no more, in most cases, than not being unjust.

But persons of whom we know nothing, and with whom we never had any communication; persons who are at the greatest distance from us; and whom, whether we consider their numbers, the different places of their abode, or the variety of their circumstances, the most remote consequences of our justice or injustice cannot be supposed to reach; may feel the kind effects of our generosity and compassion. And as its influence is so much wider, and, at the same time, the benefits that accrue to the world by it beyond comparison greater, than can result from the mere exercise of justice, this is a convincing and unanswerable demonstration of its superior excellence. And considering the vast usefulness of this virtue, together with its intrinsic beauty, it is no wonder that it engages the admiration, the affection, and gratitude of mankind to such a degree, that “for a good man some would even dare to die.”

From what hath been said we may infer, the great wisdom and goodness of God in the frame of human nature;

ture ; which is so formed, as strongly to approve of kind and beneficent actions, even when it has no particular interest in them ; and has an immediate abhorrence of malice and cruelty. Benevolence, as hath been shewn, is the chief dignity and glory of mankind, and that virtue on which all the advantages and happiness of social life, in a great measure, depend. The all-wise creator, therefore, hath graciously provided for it in our very make and constitution ; and not only endued us with reason, whereby we are capable of contriving and consulting for the good of others, but planted in us such strong instincts and natural propensions to benevolence and compassion, as cannot be over ruled and extinguished without losing humanity itself ; and, by this means, he hath counterballanced the principle of self-love, which, were it not for our benevolent affections, would engage us in narrow schemes, and little mean pursuits, inconsistent with the welfare of society, and the general happiness of our fellow-creatures.

What hath been said may likewise lead us to reflect on the excellency of the christian religion, which has carried the noble principle of benevolence to its
highest

highest pitch, and improved it to the utmost perfection of which it is capable. The whole strain of christianity is love, harmony and peace, condescension and mutual forbearance, tender mercy and compassion. The charity which it recommends, “suffereth long and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things.” Nay, we are commanded to be “rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;” and even “to lay down our lives for the brethren; walking in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering, and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.” And on this command our Saviour lays a peculiar stress, and makes it the very characteristic of a christian.

Our holy religion inculcates farther, not only the most disinterested and generous, but the most extensive benevolence; love to all mankind, notwithstanding

ing any difference of nation, religion, or interest; love even to our enemies, not “rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing.” It gives us frequent assurances that this virtue is, in a particular manner, pleasing to God, and will entitle us to a most glorious reward. It sets before us an example of it, in our own nature, in the character of the author and finisher of our faith, “who went about doing good;” and requires, that we “look not only on our own things, but every man also on the things of others;” and that the same “mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus;” who, though he was “in the form of God, made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself,” and, to accomplish our salvation, “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” It proposes to our imitation the example of the supreme creator and father of mankind, whose goodness is unlimited and universal; especially in giving his son to die for us, even “whilst we were his enemies; for
“ if

“ if God fo loved us, we ought alfo to
“ love one another.”

Let us then cultivate, to the utmoft, difinterested and univerfal benevolence; for what is the perfection of our religion muft alfo be the rectitude and honour of our nature. Let our conftant aim be the good of mankind. Let us enlarge our minds daily, from little narrow prejudices, that all our private pleasures, our friendships, our regards to our country, may be regulated with a view to this as their ultimate end. Nay, if it were poffible, we fhould extend our thoughts beyond our own fpecies, and take in the whole univerfe of rational beings; for the more unbounded fcope we give to our benevolence and compaffion, the more truly noble and generous it is; and the more nearly do we refemble the fupreme fountain of goodnefs, whole
“ tender mercies are over all his works.”



S E R M O N X I I .

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF CONCEAL- ING SIN.

JOB, xxxiv. 22.

*There is no darknefs, nor shadow of death,
where the workers of iniquity may hide
themselves.*

TOO many are restrained from iniquity, not so much by a sense of its baseness, as by the fear of censure, and of the punishments prepared for it
by

by human laws. The eyes and resentments of mankind are the only security to their honesty ; and therefore, if at any time they could be assured of concealment, they would abstain from no crimes by which they could propose to themselves either profit or pleasure. Such are the persons, whom Job describes :
“ They are of those who rebel against
“ the light ; they know not the ways
“ thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof. The murderer rising before the
“ light, killeth the poor and needy, and
“ in the night is as a thief. The eye
“ also of the adulterer, waiteth for the
“ twilight, saying no eye shall see me ;
“ and disguiseth his face. In the dark
“ they dig through houses, which they
“ had marked for themselves in the day-
“ time ; they know not the light. For
“ the morning is to them even as the
“ shadow of death : if one know them,
“ they are in the terrors of the shadow
“ of death.”

It is true, they seldom find it an easy matter to conceal their evil actions effectually from their fellow-creatures. Few crimes are so artfully covered, but that in time, they are revealed ; or hid so
deep,

deep, but that they are afterwards disclosed to the notice of mankind. That which was spoken in darkness, commonly is heard in the light; and that, which was acted or whispered in closets, proclaimed in places of public concourse. Men are often observed by others, when they little suspect it: and, if they have any companions in their crimes, they have reason to fear, they may discover and accuse them; for how can they depend on their faithfulness, to whose dishonesty they are conscious? Their interest, it is plain, often leads them to betray their associates, and therefore can be no firm tie upon their secrecy. And if they have any remaining sense of honour and conscience, it should naturally prompt them to expose the partners of their guilt to the shame and punishment they deserve; that by this means they may make some reparation to mankind for their own injustice.

But though no mortal besides himself, was privy to a man's crimes, yet generally wickedness leaves behind it some plain footsteps, by following which men trace out the author. Amidst the perplexity, which guilt creates, he may
forget

forget to conceal some trifling circumstance, or let fall some heedless word, which may lead to a full discovery. Nature may get the better of his caution, and truth slip from him, before he is aware. He cannot even sleep in security, lest in his dreams he should publish, what in his wakeful hours he with difficulty hides.

Many also have been so much tormented, by the furies of an evil conscience, that in hopes of gaining some sort of relief, they have voluntarily confessed their crimes, when they were certain of bringing upon themselves the severest punishment. From all which it is evident, that what we commonly say of murder, is true also of other kinds of wickedness; that they can seldom long escape the notice of mankind, when conducted with the greatest art and privacy.

If therefore men had no other witnesses to fear besides their fellow creatures, it would be somewhat dangerous however to venture upon wickedness in hopes of concealment. The mask though contrived and managed ever so artfully, may possibly be seen through, or may fall off, and leave them in the utmost confusion.

confusion. Or should they always escape a discovery, they must live in the perpetual apprehension of it, and the solicitude with which they guard against it, and the fear lest one time or other, it will be made, may render them much more miserable than they would have been had their crimes been immediately detected and punished. Besides every man has a witness within himself, that justly claims from him a higher regard than all men upon earth; a witness whose observation he has not the least possibility of escaping. “There is no darkness
“nor shadow of death, where the work-
“ers of iniquity may hide themselves” from their own minds. Our consciences forever attend us, and narrowly watch our conduct wherever we are, and whatever we do. These are companions which we cannot shake off, and from whom we cannot conceal our designs and actions either by day or night, abroad or at home, in company or solitude. If we will not be restrained by their gentle admonitions from engaging in wickedness, they will afterwards punish us for it, by forcing us to suffer the most mortifying and painful of all censures.

And

And though we may for a season stifle or slight their rebukes, they will certainly find their time to speak, and to speak in such a manner, as will constrain our attention. If then we suffer them to observe us doing any thing mean (and if we do it they must observe us) though we have all possible assurance that no mortal shall ever know it; though we so far deceive the world, as to preserve to the last an extraordinary character for sanctity and goodness; yet so long as our own hearts are conscious to our guilt, they will daily condemn us, and oblige us to undergo the severest of punishments; for among all the miseries of human life, there is none more grievous, than that, of a soul, which heartily despiseth and hateth itself.

Hence that excellent and almost divine precept, *reverence thyself*; that is, let thy own mind be to thee instead of a thousand spectators, and pay a sacred regard to its judgment concerning thee. Thus neither the opportunity of solitude, nor of darkness, will tempt thee to be guilty of any mean action; since in the most perfect solitude and profound darkness, thou still carriest a spirit along with thee,

thee, whose favour it highly concerns thee to secure, and from whom thou canst not possibly conceal any of thy thoughts, words, or actions.

But there is also another witness, from which the workers of iniquity can by no means be concealed. “There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where they may hide themselves from the divine being.” God is continually present with all the works of his hands, and conscious to whatever is done or designed in the universe. The spirit of the Lord fills the world, and can neither be excluded out of any place, nor confined within any limits. He passes through, actuates and supports the whole frame of nature. He is diffused through every part of his creation; through heaven and earth, and air and sea; and through the boundless expanse which lies beyond them. There is no portion of space, which is void of him, nor the least thing he has made, which he does not essentially inhabit. His substance is within the substance of every being, whether material or immaterial, and as intimately present to it, as that being is to itself. He can neither retire from, nor enter in-

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to any place, because he is always in every place. The attempt would be equally vain to fly from him, or to draw near him, for we are every moment involved in his being, and sustained by his power. Were the soul (as an eminent writer expresses it) separate from the body, and with one glance of thought, should start beyond the bounds of the creation; should she for millions of years continue her progress through infinite space with the same activity, she would still find herself within the embrace of her Creator, and encompassed round with the immensity of the godhead. In short, wherever we are, he is incessantly with us, and in us, and every where about us.

He is not indeed the object of our sense, but, though always present with us, remains always invisible. "If we
 "look forward we shall not find him
 "there, or backward we shall not perceive him. On the left hand where
 "he worketh we cannot behold him, he
 "hideth himself on the right hand that
 "we cannot see him." Yet we ought not upon this account to doubt that he
 "is ever with us, and constantly observes
 "the way that we take." We cannot
 in

in like manner see the wind, when it acts on every side of us, with great force. We cannot see our own spirits, which animate and move these material frames. But as we conclude from its works, that a human soul is present; in the same manner we may infer the omnipresence of God, from the effects, he is always and every where producing. If we look upwards, the heavens declare his presence with them, by their splendid appearance, constant harmony and regular motions. If we turn our eyes upon the earth, we find him acting incessantly on the whole system of matter, and working it up into an endless variety of beautiful forms; breathing souls into numberless animals; and filling all the regions of nature with multitudes of living creatures. Every tree, plant and flower, every animal, and the minutest insect proclaim a present deity, who wrought them out of the rude mass of matter, inspired their various degrees of life, and conducts them through their several stages from their birth to their dissolution.

The divine mind, therefore, is not merely present in the same manner that bodies are present, which are insensible

of any thing about them; but he is vitally and consciously present with all his works. Since he resides in every thing, he must perceive and know every thing. He cannot but be conscious of every motion, that arises in the material world, which he essentially pervades; and of every thought that stirs in the intellectual world, to every part of which he is intimately united. His eye is equally upon us in company or the deepest retirement. He inspects our midnight haunts, as well as our noon-day conduct. He counts all our steps; knows every thought we conceive; and sees the silent wishes and hidden purposes of our hearts, as clearly as the most public actions of our lives. “He seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart itself.”

The psalmist has given us, in the cxxxixth psalm, an excellent representation of the infinite presence and knowledge of God; in which one knows not what to admire most; the justness of the sentiments, the sublime manner in which they are delivered, or the fulness of the description. Instead of saying,
“the

“ the Lord hath searched us,” he gives it the more affecting form of an address to God, “ O Lord, thou hast searched
“ me, and known me. Thou knowest
“ my down-sitting and mine up-rising :
“ thou understandest my thoughts afar
“ off. Thou compassest my path and
“ my lying down, and art acquainted
“ with all my ways. For there is not a
“ word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord,
“ thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast
“ beset me behind and before, and laid
“ thine hand upon me. Such know-
“ ledge is too wonderful for me ; it is
“ high, I cannot attain unto it. Whi-
“ ther shall I go from thy spirit ? or whi-
“ ther shall I flee from thy presence ?
“ if I ascend up into heaven, thou art
“ there ; if I make my bed in hell, be-
“ hold thou art there : if I take the
“ wings of the morning, and dwell in
“ the uttermost parts of the sea, even
“ there shall thy hand lead me, and thy
“ right hand shall hold me ; if I say sure-
“ ly the darkness shall cover me ; even
“ the night shall be light about me. Yea
“ the darkness hideth not from thee, but
“ the night shineth as the day : the dark-

“nefs and the light are both alike to thee.”

Thus it appears both from reason and scripture, that nothing can be hidden from the divine mind. Let not therefore the good man fear, nor the wicked presume, that God will overlook him amidst the multiplicity of his works. “Say not thou, I will hide myself from the Lord : shall any remember me from above ? I shall not be remembered among so many people, for what is my soul among such an infinite number of creatures ?” Let not the sinner, I say, encourage himself with such vain thoughts, but be assured that the infinite spirit surveys all persons and things at once, without the least distraction or difficulty to himself. Man, it is true, may seem but an indifferent being, when compared with the immensity of nature ; yet he is not overlooked by the divine being, who attends to the least and most inconsiderable things, as well as the greatest. Doth man escape his observation ? even a sparrow doth not fall to the ground unnoticed by him, but the very hairs of our head are all numbered.

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We are so accustomed to our own imperfections, that we can hardly forbear to mix them with our conceptions of the divine nature; and are ready to imagine, that what is impossible or difficult to us, may be also to that being, who is infinitely above us. But let us not think God such a one as ourselves; unmindful of the vast difference there is between him and us. Man being confined to a small part of space, cannot attend to many objects at the same time; but the divine mind, being infinitely diffused, can observe at once an infinite number of beings without the least perplexity. We may retire from man, because he is present in one place only; we cannot retire from God, because he is equally, and constantly present in all places. With regard to man, we may be alone; with regard to God, we are always in company. Could we rise to the height of heaven, or sink into the bowels of the earth, the spirit of God is there already. Could we dart ourselves with the swiftness of thought, through the chambers of the east, or fly beyond the remotest west, the spirit of God is there already. Should we betake ourselves to the most soli-

tary places, which were never frequented by human feet, we should still be encompassed by the same spirit, that surrounds us here; should we enwrap ourselves in the curtains of the night; the shade, which is impervious to mortal eyes, is perfectly transparent to the divine vision. Walls and darkness may cover our guilt from the vision of men; but no darkness can shelter us from the inspection of God; no walls can intercept his view. We may impose upon men by a fair appearance; but the eye of God pierces through all the veils and doubles of hypocrisy. Men look only at our outward actions, and know even them but very imperfectly; but God is acquainted with our most secret conduct; sees the principles upon which we act, and the desires, which we stifle in our own breasts.

Since then we are ever involved in the divine presence, and ever observed by his all-seeing eye; as to be inattentive to his presence were gross stupidity; so to disregard his inspection, were absolute madness. He is nearer to us and better acquainted with us, than any other being can be. His favour is more valuable, and his displeasure more dreadful,

ful, than that of all other beings in the universe. He is not, therefore, a witness to be despised; but worthy of greater observance, than the most august assembly upon earth. Shall we reverence the eyes and opinions of men, and be restrained from wickedness by their presence; and shall we not reverence the observation of God? Shall we be ashamed of doing a mean action before human spectators, and shall we not blush at the very thought of it, when we consider that the thought itself is noticed by the greatest and best of beings? Shall we fear the resentment of mankind, and the evils threatened by human laws; and shall we not regard the displeasure of the Almighty, and the punishments he will infallibly execute upon the wicked? Let no man deceive himself; God is not an idle and indifferent spectator of men, and their actions. “He searches the hearts
“and tries the reins, even to give every
“man according to his ways, and accord-
“ing to the fruit of his doings. He is of
“purer eyes than to behold evil, or look
“upon iniquity” without abhorrence. No crime is committed either in public or private, but he sees it; he hates the guilt

he sees; and the guilt he hates, he will assuredly punish. The sinner is no more able to escape the effects of his displeasure, than to conceal himself from his notice; and the very consciousness, that he is obnoxious to the justice of an omnipotent being, who at all times and in all places is intimately united with him, is sufficient of itself to make him miserable. What can be conceived more gloomy and wretched, than the condition of a man that knows he has one for his enemy, from whose presence he cannot flee, from whose knowledge he cannot be concealed, and from whose power all nature can afford him no protection? But suppose he remains insensible of the divine presence; yet God, who resides with him is able to punish him in whatever manner or degree he may judge proper. He can hinder the greatest comforts from refreshing him, and convert them into occasions of grief and affliction. He can aggravate the sorrows of his life, and give an edge to the slightest calamities that befall him. Every circumstance of his present lot is ordered by the providence of God; who can therefore make his condition deplorable according to his pleasure.

But

But the time is coming, when they that live as without God in the world, shall be made sensible of his presence in a dreadful manner, “when the son of
“man shall come in his glory, and all
“the holy Angels with him; all nations
“shall be gathered before him; and e-
“very work shall be brought into judg-
“ment, and every secret thought.” The hidden things of dishonesty shall then be revealed, and that wickedness laid open, which in this life had escaped the observation of mankind. The hypocrite, that had triumphed secretly in his craft, and thought himself happy in deceiving the world, shall then be detected with shame; and his guilt, which was always known to God, be exposed to the view of angels and men.

What then remains, but that we behave continually as on a crowded theatre; as in the sight of mortal and immortal beings; to some of whom we are known already, and shall be to others hereafter. Let us be as far from doing any thing wrong and unjust when we have all possible assurance of the deepest secrecy, as when we act in the presence of a multitude. Let us reverence God;

and the spirit that is within us ; and never esteem any place to be dark and private enough for injustice, wherein we cannot hide ourselves and our crimes from these venerable witnesses. Let us see to it, that our conduct be honourable, whether men observe it or not ; and be careful not only that our outward actions are unblameable, but also that our hearts are upright, and our intentions honest. Then will our own consciences thoroughly approve us ; then shall we have confidence towards God and man ; and instead of vainly wishing we could conceal ourselves from the divine being, we shall have reason to rejoice in the thought of his continual presence and inspection ; and may adopt the language of Job, “ behold my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.”

S E R M O N XIII.

THE CAUSES AND DANGER OF SELF-
DECEIT.

MAT. VI. 22. 23.

The light of the body is the eye, if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body is full of light; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light, that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?

AS the bodily eye is of great use in the animal life, to direct its powers, and to increase its enjoyments; so, there is an interior eye of the mind of equal importance
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to the direction of our highest capacities, and to the chief ends of our being, which is the sense of good and evil, both natural and moral; or, the judgment of the soul concerning their difference, and the methods of pursuing the one and avoiding the other. This last is the subject of our Saviour's instruction in the text, under the allusion of the single and the evil eye, in consequence of which, as these are in fact the different conditions of men, they are either wisely and justly guided to the true perfection and happiness of their nature, or in a state of ignorance, fatal misconduct, and misery. There are certain conditions necessary that the natural organ of sight may properly do its office: it must be duly framed, and its parts regularly disposed; and it must be free from the mixture of corrupt humours. And the same may be observed concerning the eye of the mind. It is probably uniform in its original frame; the same sense of good and evil, and the same inclination to choose the former and forsake the latter, being a necessary part of the human constitution: but this inward eye may be obscured
and

and weakened by several accidental causes; by neglecting to cultivate and improve it; by an habitual attention to wrong misleading objects; or by the prevalence of particular inferior affections.

My present design is to explain this subject for our necessary caution, that we may avoid such pernicious mistakes as we may be sure it is always in our power to avoid; or, that we may not suffer the state of our minds to be such, as that "the light in them shall be darkness." In pursuance of this intention, what I have farther to say shall be reduced to a few observations, tending to convince us of the danger, and lead us into the causes of this destructive self-deceit and practical error, in the affairs of religion and our happiness, that so we may be the better instructed to escape them.

There are plain declarations of scripture, clearly intimating that men are apt to fall, and often do fall, into such mistakes; and particularly, that they often misjudge the state of their own minds, and their deliberate actions. Solomon says, "the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes;" not that he disguises them to the world, and

and affects to throw a veil over their infirmities, which he himself in the mean time, is inwardly conscious of; but they are pure in his own judgment, he sees them in a wrong light; by a strange infatuation he imagines them to be innocent, or at least, not so criminal as to forfeit his integrity and his acceptance with God; which is a most pernicious mistake, amounting to a thorough, or a total darkness; and it proceeds from an erroneous judgment concerning the true nature and character of our ways, or the course of our deliberate actions.

As there are plain intimations of this in scripture, scarcely can any attentive person miss of observing instances of it within the compass of his own acquaintance. How common is it for men to make solemn professions of religion, and declare their confident hopes of acceptance with God, while yet it is notorious that they continue in a vicious course of life? And how shall this be accounted for, without supposing the grossest self-deceit? Such men must imagine, either that the crimes in which they indulge themselves are no crimes, at least, have not such malignity as wholly to destroy their integrity, deprave

prave the religious state of their minds, and cut off their hopes of pleasing God; or that something of a different kind which they do, or which they are resolved afterwards to do, will make amends for their deficiency in virtue and obedience; both which errors are utterly inconsistent with the plainest principles of morality, and the most express declarations of the gospel.

The most general cause of this self-deceit in the affairs of religion is some prevailing corrupt affection, or passion. I do not say the only cause, for it is certain other prejudices, particularly those of education, may mislead men in this important matter. Whole nations, and for many ages, have been mistaken in points of morality, "calling evil good, and putting darkness for light," which to others better instructed have appeared very evident. But in those parts of the world where knowledge abounds, at least where christianity is intelligibly proposed, where yet a great many are deceived in the great concern of their salvation and the way of attaining it, the general cause is some predominant evil affection or irregular passion.

passion. Such is known to be the weakness of human nature, that our judgments are very much biaſſed by our affections; not that the aſſent of the mind directly and immediately depends upon the will, which certainly it does not; for we often find ourselves conſtrained to believe what we are the moſt diſinclined to; but it is in our power in a great measure to deprive ourselves of, and to defeat the beſt means of attaining to or preſerving, the knowledge of the moſt important truths, by turning away our attention from the evidence of them, and engaging it to different, or contrary objects: and this is principally owing to the influence of prevalent evil affections and paſſions, eſpecially when habitually indulged; ſo that the truth not being received in the love of it, but detained in unrighteouſneſs, and the light which makes our deeds ma- niſeſt being hated, as our Saviour ſpeaks, by degrees produces inſenſibility, and even unbelief. This was the reaſon why the Jews rejected chriſtianity, and the very cauſe of their condemnation, “ that
“ when the light of the goſpel came into
“ the world, they loved darkneſs rather
“ than

“than light, because their deeds were
“evil.”

The immediate result of vicious affections and unruly passions thoroughly possessing the hearts of men, is an unfairness in all their enquiries concerning their duty. A man may usefully, to the purpose of discerning the true moral state of his mind, consider two opposite parties or interests within himself; the superior, that of reason and conscience, which is properly the man; and the inferior, consisting of animal appetites, affections, and passions. When the latter has got the ascendant, and the practical determination of the heart is in its favour, points of the highest moment to the ends of religion and our rational happiness are against us; and therefore, in our own thoughts, when we cannot avoid considering them, which is what we would rather choose, we are willing to take all advantages against them, to obscure their evidence, to lessen their importance, or, at least, to weaken their force and influence on our own minds. This is what I call unfairness, and criminal partiality. We should call it so in any other case. Should we not call him an
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unjust and partial man, who should enter into the examination of a cause between two parties with such a bias to the one, as would determine him to lay hold of, to improve, and even strain every circumstance to promote his interest; and by all the arts he could use, to hurt the other? And why may not a man be said to be dishonest, who studies to impose upon, and thereby to hurt himself, as well as he who deals so by another? It is true, no man has an express intention to injure or make himself unhappy, but I do not think this alters the case; for if we enquire narrowly, perhaps we shall seldom find it any man's principal intention in any injuries he does, to hurt another, or make him unhappy. Wrongs do not proceed from disinterested malice, but from selfishness. And in like manner, though self-love be an inextinguishable principle in us, and we can form no design explicitly contrary to it, yet through the vehemence of particular affections we may be drawn into a blind partiality against our own true interest. Thus it is that the eye becomes evil, and the whole man full of darkness; by his partiality, by his dishonesty, which
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is as directly as any thing can be said to be, his own fault. For this never happens without some remonstrances on the part of (what Solomon calls the candle of the Lord within us) our own self-reflecting powers; which, however, prove ineffectual, and conscience, after some feeble efforts, is at last laid asleep and becomes insensible.

But though the real cause of self deception is the corruption of the heart, yet there must be some plausible pretences and false colours, that men's minds may be effectually darkened. For, the understanding must have some appearance of truth, that it may give its assent in any degree, and particularly, a bad moral object must be disguised, that the eye of the soul may not discern its turpitude. One instance of this kind, is a false imagination, that something different from true moral piety and virtue, as they appear to the mind in their genuine simplicity, will answer the ends of them, and make amends for defects in them, rendering them acceptable to God. It is first of all supposed, and we naturally assent to it, that the end of all religion is pleasing the Deity. It is then insinuated, that the strict observance of some positive appointments will
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certainly please him ; while it is not considered (what the voice of reason, as well as scripture, would convince us of, if we attended to it) that morally good dispositions and actions are, to this purpose, not only of equal, but vastly superior necessity and importance. This is the evil of superstition ; placing religion in the things wherein it does not consist, or which are of little or no moment to its chief end. It is what experience shews us men have always been easily led into, heathens, jews, and christians ; and nothing has been more successful in blinding the eyes of their understandings and corrupting their moral judgment. What impurities, wickedness, and barbarities, have been committed in the world, while men have thought they were doing God service, at least, fondly imagined they sufficiently reconciled themselves to him by ceremonies of their own invention, or by complying with merely external observances which were of divine institution, but never intended by their author to be substituted in the room of the weightier matters of his law !

But, though superstition be one great means of self-deceit in matters of religion,

on, of vitiating the eye of the mind, or corrupting the practical moral judgment; it is not the only one. Some men who have the justest notions of religion, placing it not in forms and ceremonies, but in righteousness, temperance, godliness, and charity, yet commit the most grievous trespasses against some of those virtues, still flattering themselves that their state is good; at least, that they shall escape with impunity, and at last "die the death of the righteous." In order to this, such is the deceitfulness of sin, that even vice itself puts on the false appearance of virtue. Thus, extravagance is represented to the deluded imagination of the sinner as generosity; ambition as a laudable greatness of spirit; and covetousness passes for prudent frugality; and, generally, men are deluded into real wickedness, or at least, support themselves in it, by the false disguise of something praise-worthy. But if this be too palpable an absurdity to pass upon the minds of men, as in many cases it is, their next subterfuge is to lessen their favourite vices into tolerable infirmities. It is a principle generally received, and if rightly understood, it is a true one, that some failures
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will always cleave to us while we are in this imperfect state; “there is not a just man that liveth upon the earth and sinneth not.” But the error lies in diminishing a wilful sin, even habitually indulged, so as to make it pass with the deluded mind for such a weakness as is consistent with sincerity in the main; which certainly is an instance of the grossest partiality. To this is added, as another excuse wherewith men hide from their own eyes the malignity of their transgressions, that temptations are very violent, and their own ability to resist them is small; they are frail creatures; and this is charged to the account of nature which made them so, or of providence which placed them in unhappy circumstances. And thus they reason in their own thoughts: Will not an equitable, especially a compassionate governor, in his demands of obedience from his subjects make an allowance for their natural infirmities with which he is well acquainted, and for the difficulties they meet with in doing their duty from inevitable hard circumstances and violent opposition? In the mean time, the truth is, the strength of temptations complained of, is the impetuous

petuous vehemence of irregular desire and passion, increased by a customary compliance, which is really criminal; and the alledged impotence of the mind, is no more than the want of good affections and resolutions, which every one must see to be our own fault.

And, lastly, there is nothing whereby men more frequently delude themselves, and cover from their own sight the present evil and danger of their state, than feeble ineffectual purposes of a future amendment and obedience. The amiableness and the necessity of virtue appear to them in too strong a light to be hid, or even disguised by any pretence; so does the deformity, and the pernicious tendency of vicious habits. What method then do they take to quiet their consciences and support their hopes? Even while they continue in a sinful course, they flatter themselves that in their hearts they are on the side of virtue; as a proof of which, they form half-resolves, that at some time or other they will go over to it in practice, though some very urgent temptation hinders them from forsaking their sins immediately. In all these cases

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inconsideration is the bane of sincerity, and contributes above all things to self-deceit. If we would carefully attend, it is impossible such empty vain fallacies should be able to mislead the weakest mind; but the affections being deeply engaged, we do not care to think, lest we should be undeceived.

What hath been said, and what our Saviour teaches in the text, may be very properly applied for a warning to us, and should lead us to examine ourselves; but is not to be carried so far, as to mean, that men are under a necessity of being self-deceived, or in an utter uncertainty concerning their own true character and temper. Some imagine this to be naturally the condition of mankind; and a very unhappy condition it would be; one would think it hardly consistent with the divine moral perfections to place such creatures as we are in it. Thus they interpret the words of the prophet Jeremiah, in the name of the Lord, “The heart is deceitful above all things, “and desperately wicked, who can know “it?” which words have no relation at all to the subject of self-deceit, as appears
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from the context, where the prophet is dissuading the Jews from, and shewing the folly of, putting their trust in men, the sincerity of whose friendship is not to be depended on, more than their strength; for that the hearts of men, that is, many of mankind, are deceitful and desperately wicked. I have shewn already, that we never are necessarily self-deceived, but always voluntarily and by our own fault; and that unhappy state of mind is only incurred through the prevalence of evil affections, and a stupid inattention. But though some hearts may be fatally hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, this does not hinder but that there may be sufficient clearness and certainty in the testimony of conscience to sincere minds; and they have no reasonable ground of doubt or suspicion concerning their own integrity, and the safety of the way in which they walk. Of this we have many plain instances in scripture; the servants of God speak of it in very strong terms, and even with full assurance; they were altogether satisfied that they walked before God in truth and with perfect hearts; they rejoiced in the

testimony of their consciences that in “simplicity and godly sincerity, they “had their conversation in this world.” They “knew whom they believed, and “were persuaded he was able to keep “that which they committed to him against that day.”

The object being so intimately near, even within ourselves, and the evidence so immediate (for it is the testimony of our own hearts) one would think we should have the greatest certainty, and be least liable to deception in judging of the internal light, or the state of mind itself; for there can be no doubt concerning what we are conscious of, and there is nothing the soul perceives so clearly as what it perceives by looking into itself. This in general is true; but there is a difference in the objects of our conscious perception. Such as are the most simple are the most certainly known. There is nothing we discern so distinctly, and the knowledge of which so much excludes the possibility of doubt, as our own being, our powers, and operations. But where the object of self-reflection is complex, as is the moral state of the soul, considering

sidering how imperfect we are, and that there are contrary tendencies even within our hearts, there is a possibility, nay, and a danger of mistake. And yet there is a sufficient certainty, where the mind is conscious of a calm deliberate attention, and that it is so far impartial as not to be prepossessed in favour of some interest, or object of affection, which it is not willing to bring to clear light. This may be illustrated by the familiar example of the bodily eye, the figure used in the text; it is in a due disposition sufficient for its proper purposes in the natural life; indeed a man in a fever or a dream may not perceive sensible things truly as they are; yet one who knows himself not out of order, and awake, may trust his eye-sight within its own sphere. In like manner, though he who is full of hypocrisy and iniquity, may deceive and flatter himself in his own imagination; yet the truly virtuous mind, calmly and deliberately attentive to its own dispositions and exercises, and knowing in itself that it has no prejudice in favour of any vice, but would with pleasure receive a conviction of all its faults

faults in order to amendment, and thus, not condemning itself but rejoicing in the testimony of conscience concerning its sincerity, and persevering with steady resolutions in the uniform practice of all that is pure, and just, and honest, as far as it is understood; such a mind, I say, from its own inward feelings and having so single an eye, possesses tranquility and peace, with confidence towards God, on so solid a foundation, as to cast out fear, which hath torment, and all suspicion of self-deceit.

The case of the human mind being as hath been represented with respect to its judgment in the affairs of religion, and particularly its own moral or spiritual state, it is always safe to be so far diffident and jealous of ourselves as to keep a strict watch over our own hearts, and narrowly observe their motions. A total absence of distrust very often betrays men into mistakes, and lays them open to the most dangerous impositions. It is so with respect to others; no man can impose upon us so much as he in whom we put the greatest confidence: and it is so with respect to ourselves; we are never
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in more danger of judging wrong in the matters we are now considering, than when we are carelessly secure, and altogether unsuspicious. In this sense Solomon wisely pronounces him a fool "who trusteth in his own heart," that is, who relies upon, and implicitly follows all the rash and unconsidered suggestions which may arise in his own mind, perhaps from appetite or passion. For certainly the man who above all others is least liable to self-deceit, is he who is most aware of his danger, and gives the most constant wakeful attention to his heart. There is one symptom which generally, perhaps universally in some degree, accompanies a bad state of mind and the influence of wrong motives in the counsels of our hearts, relating to our moral conduct; and that is, a general secret suspicion that all is not right within, causing perturbation, uneasiness, and an hurry of thought, with a desire to get rid of it. I have said, that a total absence of doubt, or distrust, is dangerous; but, against this we have for the most part a warning, in a secret misgiving of

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heart, which however proves ineffectual, producing no other effect than a haste to get over it, because we are unwilling to examine it, lest that should end in a dissatisfaction with ourselves: like a bankrupt, who fearing, or having a general knowledge, that the state of his affairs is bad, wilfully declines looking into them more particularly, and examining his accounts, lest he should thereby discover what he would be very loth to find. Let us be always upon our guard, that we may do justice to ourselves, that we may preserve our integrity, and have consciences void of offence; particularly let us not neglect the natural admonitions we have in the secret suspicions of self-deceit which arise in our own breasts; let us not pass them over slightly, but examine them with deliberation and candour, that we may be fully satisfied concerning the grounds upon which we act.

In ordinary life, and in cases of importance, what is right and wrong in a question proposed will generally appear to our first thoughts; so good is God to his intelligent creatures, teaching them
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what they should do ; so plain are his precepts, so sure a guide, “ a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path.” Therefore, it is for the most part safe to rest in the first representation of conscience ; at least, we should studiously endeavour to keep a clear and lively sense of it. When we incline to take a wider compass in our deliberations, to enter into a long detail of circumstances and tedious perplexing debates, the truth of the case may be, I am afraid often is, that we are only looking out for plausible pretences, whereby to mislead our own judgment, and endeavouring to reconcile an appearance of right, to selfish interest or inclination.

In order to prevent self-deceit, and find out the truth more exactly, it may be expedient to substitute another person in our own place, and consider how we should judge if the case were a neighbour's to whom we are indifferent : perhaps a fault, a moral blemish, might thus be more easily spied, and a “ mote in a brother's eye, better discerned than a beam in our own.” It might be profitable too, to change the judge, as well

as the party to be tried. Make the supposition that a person entirely disinterested, were to hold the enquiry, knowing as perfectly what passes in our minds, as we do ourselves. Nay, suppose a malicious enemy to have that province, who would curiously pry into every secret corner to detect the most latent corruption. Surely a well-governed self-love makes it more our interest to discover our faults, in order to amend them, than hatred could make it his interest in order to expose them.

Lastly; Let us always earnestly implore the assistance of Almighty God, that we may be led into the knowledge of the most important religious truths, and be preserved from fatal errors and darkness. He is "the Father of lights," "from whom every good and perfect gift comes down," and he will give liberally, without upbraiding, to every one who is sensible that he wants wisdom, and asks it from him. Nor is there any blessing we can supplicate with greater confidence of obtaining it, if we ask not amiss, but with an upright intention to know that we may do his will. Let us, then, devoutly adopt the prayer
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of David ; “ Search me, O God ! and
“ know my heart ; try me and know my
“ thoughts ; and see if there be any
“ wicked way in me, and lead me in the
“ way everlasting.”



S E R M O N XIV.

THE DUTY AND ADVANTAGE OF STUDYING THE WORKS OF NATURE.

JOB, XXXVII. 14.

*Stand still, and consider the wondrous works
of God.*

THIS admonition of Elihu's to Job, however improper or needless it may seem, when applied to a person so religiously and devoutly disposed; is certainly very proper, and very needful, with
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respect to the generality of mankind ; who are ever prone to overlook those objects that above all things deserve their attention, and to fix their eyes and hearts on matters of infinitely less moment. Through all the works of nature God has displayed such manifold proofs, such amazing instances of perfect art and consummate skill ; has placed before our eyes such a variety of glorious scenes, and framed every thing in such order and beauty, harmony and proportion ; that it may seem strange men should ever want to be called on to consider them. For what can be more entertaining, what more useful ? What employment more worthy of those sublime faculties which God hath given us, which he hath given us for this very purpose, and by which he hath qualified us for so noble a contemplation ? He hath distinguished us with superior powers, crowned us with the divine gift of reason and understanding, and thereby blessed us, if we will be blessed, with a participation of his own image.

Though we worship God as duly as we ought, which is far from being the case ; yet still might we fall short of what
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he requires at our hands, and what even natural reason teacheth us. Can we think it enough that at certain seasons we offer up our prayers and praises to God, if at all other times we cast him out of our minds, and suffer our thoughts and affections to be alienated from him? We are employed perhaps about some or other of his creatures; but how, and with what intentions? Do we regard them as the workmanship of an all-wise and almighty creator? Observing how exquisitely they are formed, what ends they promote, and to what uses they serve? Do we take due notice of those perfections which are visible to every eye, and obvious to every understanding; how the world is replenished, and the creation adorned; how wisely every thing is adapted, and how graciously designed? Alas! these are points which seldom enter our thoughts; and we seem to look upon them as enquiries peculiar to speculative men. If our minds are employed about the works of nature, it is for the most part with a quite different view. Our great care is how to make them subservient to our worldly interest, and administer to our sensual gratification.

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We are commonly very active in projecting and contriving how to make them answer those ends ; but as to the contemplation of that infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, which appear in the formation of them ; though it be the chief end of our being, and the noblest employment of life, yet how grossly is it neglected, and how generally overlooked ! In this sense we may justly apply to ourselves the prophet's charge, that we “ regard not the works of the Lord, neither consider the operations of his hands.”

It is not to be denied that we may innocently and lawfully convert the works of God, wondrous as they are, to our use and profit : nay, he actually designed we should, and ordained it one of the chief employments of human life. Nevertheless he surely expects, that while we are providing for ourselves the comforts and conveniences of life, we should likewise remember to glorify the giver of them. Though his creatures be intended to yield sustenance and raiment for our bodies, yet without question they are also meant as food and nourishment for our understandings. And if we answer

swer not both these intentions, we abuse our faculties, and debase our nature. If regardless of our minds, we take thought only for our bodies, what avails our intelligence, and wherein do we excel the brute creation? Are we possessed of high powers and capacities which they want, and is this the ground of our boasting? If we refuse to make a proper use of those powers, let us not boast of them, nor even mention them, lest our triumph end in dishonour, and our glory become our shame.

It must indeed be confessed, that a great majority of mankind have neither ability nor opportunity for deep inquiries and learned speculations. It is not therefore to be expected that they should make any great progress in the study of God's works; which indeed far surpass the ablest minds, and most enlightened understandings. The wisest and most knowing among the children of men can only, at present, see them, as it were, through a glass darkly; cannot penetrate far into the mysteries of nature, and the wonders of the creation. They are able to comprehend, after all their improvements, but a very small part of that
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amazing skill with which they are formed and conducted. And since the most profound philosophers are so short-sighted, and so much confined in their inquiries, what can avail the searches and speculations of the rest of mankind? The answer is; whether they avail much or little to the improvement of science, and the discovery of truth, it is in every man's power to consider the works of creation in such a manner as to answer, in a good measure, the purposes of religion. The wisdom of God, however unsearchable in some respects, is yet more or less conspicuous, and manifest to every rational creature. Let it not then be supposed, that the exhortation in my text concerns only men of superior skill, and refined understandings; or that the practice of it necessarily requires a great share both of leisure and learning. No man is either so illiterate, or so busy, as to be wholly discharged from this employment. Is it only to men of science, or proficient in astronomy, that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work?" Such persons have indeed superior advantages; but all mankind are capable
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in some degree of perceiving and considering those wondrous works, and may find sufficient cause both to admire *them*, and adore their Almighty author.

Again, every man thinks himself qualified to pass a judgment on works of art, of some kind or other; to discern their agreeableness and beauty, and praise the skill and contrivance of the workman. And shall not the excellence and perfection of the works of nature strike him at all? Has he no talent, no taste for those productions which are all beauty, and in comparison of which the most perfect works of art are coarse and contemptible! Can we be ignorant that the least of God's works infinitely excel the best and finest operations of men's hands? The very flowers of the field are so exquisitely framed, so curiously adorned, and so inimitably beautiful; that our blessed Saviour assures us even "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Whence then comes it to pass, that we behold the works of God with so much indifference, and so careless an eye? That we are so attentive to the smallest improvements of art, and yet so blind to the matchless
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graces and glories of nature? What makes this insensibility still more surprising, is the continual presence, or constant succession of the latter. Wherever we turn our eyes, they occur in great variety, and without number; croud in upon the sight, and as it were solicit our observation. But perhaps the reason lies the other way; and because the wonders of nature are thus common and familiar, therefore we disregard them. If this be the case, it can amount to nothing more than a proof of human weakness, or something worse. For the great plenty and universality of those wondrous works are so far from justifying our neglect, that they aggravate the blame of it; so far from reasonably diminishing our admiration, that they ought vastly to increase it. The more and greater the works of nature appear, the further and more fully they discover to us the perfections of the author. And as to the commonness of such objects; they are indeed commonly seen, but not, I fear, commonly considered. And supposing they were, what would be the consequence? Is it not true in fact, that they who have searched into them

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the deepest, have admired them the most? A nearer and more accurate contemplation has produced fresh light, as well as fuller satisfaction. If others have been pleased, these have been charmed; while others have wondered, they have been astonished.

But to return, if the employment here spoken of was only matter of curiosity or amusement; we might then be left to our liberty, and proceed as our inclinations should direct us. But it is likewise a real and important part of our duty; and that not only as we are christians, but as men and reasonable creatures. The fruits and effects of it are very considerable; for it directly tends to promote piety and virtue, to produce a right disposition, and a religious frame of spirit. This will better appear, if the subject be considered somewhat more particularly.

The productions of the earth are continually before our eyes: we generally cultivate it with great care, and reap the fruits of it in due season. And thus far our labours are not only innocent, but laudable and good. Yet certainly this, and whatever else we do, ought to be done
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with a constant and habitual view to the glory of God; as it easily may, without any inconvenience, or any disadvantage to our secular designs. And indeed what should hinder us from meditating occasionally on those wonderful works which are almost always in our sight? Or from reflecting sometimes on the wisdom and goodness of the great Creator, who so bountifully provides for the uses and occasions of human life; who “opens his hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing?” And indeed how can this be well avoided, when we behold her liberal supplies, and see “the earth so full of his riches?” Every object we meet with, whether great or small, bears the stamp of an all-perfect Creator; is a mark of his wisdom, a monument of his power, and a proof of his goodness: insomuch that it may be difficult for us to determine, whether ornament or convenience, use or dignity, has been most regarded. What perfect art, what incomprehensible contrivance appear in the formation and structure of the vegetable world! What variety and uniformity; what order, symmetry, and proportion of parts! A careful survey
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of these cannot fail of infusing pious sentiments, and leading us to cry out with the Psalmist, "Manifold are thy works, O Lord; in wisdom hast thou made them all!"

But further; if from the earth we lift up our eyes to the heavens, and survey the wonders of the firmament; what astonishing instances do we find of the creator's power and perfection; such as every eye may perceive, and every understanding contemplate? Who can see and consider, without the deepest admiration, those vast and magnificent orbs, which shine above us with so much lustre, and roll over our heads in the strictest order and regularity? When the royal penman observes in the passage before cited, that "the heavens declare the glory of God," he adds, "there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard." As if he had said, they loudly proclaim the divine power and wisdom, and speak intelligibly to all mankind. There is no people so uncivilized, no nation so barbarous, which may not receive both conviction and instruction from the heavenly bodies. So wonderful and grand a scene

scene must infallibly strike even the rudest minds, and produce awful impressions : and a strange disposition must that man have, in whom it doth not kindle pious thoughts and devout acknowledgments. To imagine such effects without a cause, or to ascribe them to a cause less than divine, is bidding defiance to the faculty of intelligence, and renouncing the character of a rational being. In like manner, to view those illustrious objects unaffected, unconcerned, and without sentiments of admiration ; what construction can it bear, but either that of obstinate impiety, or incurable stupidity ?

From inanimate things if we proceed to consider living creatures, we shall find a still clearer prospect of infinite power and wisdom. Those heavenly bodies which run their courses with so much pomp, and appear in so great splendor, have yet no higher a principle than mere matter and motion ; which falls vastly short of the principles of life and sense. When we consider the prodigious variety and multiplicity of animals that replenish this lower world, and how surprisingly they are all framed ; when we
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think of the numberless inhabitants of the earth and the air, and reflect on the wonders of the deep; when we call to mind how the several species are distinguished from each other, and what strange diversity in the whole; how admirably their natures are contrived, and adjusted to the elements wherein they are placed, and also what never-failing provision is made for their subsistence and preservation; how is it possible for us not to see and acknowledge the marvellous excellence of God's works; or to avoid confessing and proclaiming, that there is no end of his greatness!

Nevertheless our devout wonder will rise still higher, if we turn our thoughts upon ourselves, and meditate seriously on our own frame; if we observe the form and structure, and peculiar dignity even of our bodies; if we consider with the Psalmist, how "fearfully and wonderfully they are made;" how curious and delicate their texture, and yet so firm and vigorous as to continue unbroken for many years. But above all, if we reflect on the nature, the powers and faculties of our immortal souls, exalted nearly to the angels, and honoured

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with God's own image; if we observe the compass and extent of their capacities, and the sublime enjoyments for which they are qualified; the contemplation will naturally end in pious wonder and transport, and we shall humbly adore the incomprehensible power, wisdom and majesty of the great Creator.

I might go on to "consider the wondrous works of God" in the administration of his providence. For he preserves and protects the works of his hands in the same wonderful manner wherein he created them. Both furnish inexhaustible matter of meditation, and perpetually give us the justest grounds of celebrating his perfections. And moreover, nature and providence further agree in this, that there are unfathomable depths both in the one and in the other. Not much below the surface can we penetrate either; and yet the little we do see, or may see, is abundantly sufficient to answer the ends of religion, if we would but duly attend to the dictates either of reason or revelation. In order to induce us hereto, let us briefly consider the following particulars.

First;

First; That the practice required in my text directly leads to the advancement of God's Glory, which is one great end for which we were created. Herewith our happiness is inseparably connected; forasmuch as whatever promotes the one, infallibly conduces to the other. As we glorify God by considering the works of creation, and thereby discovering the perfections of the author; so we improve our own minds in a peculiar manner, and lay the surest foundation of our felicity. A frequent and attentive contemplation of God's works is productive both of the purest pleasure, and most rational devotion; and nothing would more contribute to the banishment of impiety and irreligion, than such an employment duly followed. To which may be added, that thereby the grounds of religion are laid before us in a more lively and convincing manner; forasmuch as we thus learn, that the homage and adoration which we pay to our maker, is the happiest and most reasonable service in the world. But,

Secondly; We should consider, that the extraordinary provision which God hath made for this employment, is a

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plain proof of his will, and clearly shews that he expects and requires it at our hands. If the visible works of God were not designed to exercise and entertain our intellectual faculties, why such a profusion of art and skill? Why such an endless variety of ornaments and decorations? The common uses of life require no such thing. That assemblage of beauty which adorns the face of nature and covers the earth, cannot, we know, contribute any thing to the support and nourishment of animals. There is no connection between such a cause, and such an effect. But it was fit the work should bear the signatures of its author, and appear every way worthy of him. And moreover, the finger of God was to be discernible every where; that all intelligent spectators might readily discover, and thence adore the omnipotent artist; or, in case of neglect, be left entirely without excuse.

Thirdly; The peculiar excellence and dignity of this employment is a further recommendation. In relation hereto, I have already observed, that it is the exercise of our best faculties on their noblest objects; and how can our views be
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carried higher? Or what can more conduce to the elevation and refinement of human understanding? Accordingly it has not failed to engage the best and wisest of mankind in all ages. I may add, that it was the proper and original employment of a state of innocence, and one of the chief entertainments of paradise. And, what still more raises its character, it is the business and the joy of nobler beings than men; an essential part of the bliss of angels, and all the host of heaven. So that if we have no relish for it, the misfortune is plainly owing to the corruption of our nature, and the great depravity and perverseness of our minds.

Lastly; The contemplation of God's works is a fit preparation for the enjoyments of a future state: which we must not imagine will consist in the rest or suspension of our faculties; or prove a state of indolence and inactivity. To consider and admire the wondrous works of God, and to behold his government of the universe, will doubtless be a principal branch of future felicity. Good reason therefore there is, why we should now begin to inure our-

selves to that blessed work, wherein we hope to bear a part to all eternity. If through our own folly and neglect we are quite unaccustomed to it; insomuch that we can feel no pleasure, taste no satisfaction therein; we are so far not only unprepared, but actually indisposed for the heavenly state; and thus a change and renovation of mind becomes absolutely necessary.

To conclude; Whoso is truly wise will surely “regard the wondrous works of God,” and seriously “consider the operations of his hands;” will frequently meditate thereupon, and search into them diligently and devoutly: “that he may understand,” as well and as soon as possible, “the wisdom and loving-kindness of the Lord,” and fit himself for an eternal habitation at his right hand.

S E R M O N XV.

ON INCONSTANCY IN RELIGION.

HOSEA, vi. 4.

*O Ephraim! what shall I do unto thee?
O Judah! what shall I do unto thee?
For your goodness is as a morning cloud,
and as the early dew it goeth away.*

THIS prophet was sent to the people of Israel and Judah, when the former had actually revolted from the worship of the true God to that of idols, and when the latter were in great danger

of following the example of their brethren. God chose and separated this people from all the nations of the earth, to preserve the knowledge of himself, which was almost lost amidst that general ignorance, idolatry and wickedness that prevailed in the world. He had remarkably distinguished them by many temporal blessings, and by the astonishing interpositions of his providence in their favour. And that they might not be deaf to the voice of his providence, he raised up prophets from time to time, to instruct, and shew them the intention of all his dispensations; as on the one hand, to promise them blessings on their obedience or repentance, so on the other, to threaten them with further judgments if they continued impenitent. But, though the word of God by his prophets and by his providence made some impression on them at first hearing, though their rebellious hearts were sometimes softened for the present by his mercies, or awakened by his judgments; yet neither of them had any lasting effect upon the generality of the people. Upon which account God expostulates with them by Hosea in the words of our text; in which
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he at once asserts the sufficiency of those means he had used to convince and convert them, and charges the inefficacy on themselves; at the same time expressing his resentment at their impenitency and hardness of heart: “O Ephraim! what shall I do unto thee? O Judah! what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it passeth away.”

These words are written for our admonition also. And, have we not too much reason to apply and consider them as spoken to ourselves? For though there are, without doubt, many whose goodness is not like the morning cloud and early dew, yet the number is comparatively small. How many profane, and hardened wretches do we meet with who have not so much as an appearance of goodness, but pass through the world without discovering any sense of the being in whom they live and move, or of the great ends of life! And, among these, who (having a just sense of the folly, evil, and danger of a wicked course) have resolved to be religious, how many are there in whom all these fair appear-

ances have been but as a morning cloud, or as the early dew ?

In discoursing further on this subject, I propose first, to produce some instances and examples of that kind of goodness here spoken of ; and, secondly, to inquire from what cause it arises that the goodness of any man is thus temporary and transient.

First ; I am to produce some instances of that sort of goodness here spoken of, and which are too commonly found amongst us.

These words are a lively description of those persons, who, after having been trained up in the knowledge of God and religion, have deviated from the holy commandments to the paths of sin. We must have very little acquaintance with the world, or have made no observations on the moral and religious conduct of mankind, if we have not seen some sad instances of this sort, and heard of many more. It is the remark of the wise man (and indeed a remark that has been confirmed by general experience in all ages) “ train up a child in the way “ that he should go, and when he is old “ he will not depart from it.” The seri-

ous instruction of parents, given with prudence, and seconded by their own good examples, and by their fervent prayers to the God of all grace, commonly fix such impressions on the minds of children, as remain with them to the last hour of their lives. And yet this rule is not without some melancholy exceptions. There are persons who have miscarried under all these advantages. The influence of their religious education has gradually worn off, and they have become at length as vicious in their lives, and hardened in their hearts, as those who never had the fear of God before their eyes. The fair blossoms which opened so wide, and promised so much fruit, have been shaken off, and left nothing behind but the leaves of an outward profession. Nay, often with the practice they have thrown aside the profession of religion: after having first turned rakes, they have next commenced infidels. The reason of which may be, that their religious education has left those impressions on their minds which they have no way to obliterate, but by abandoning the belief of religion. Since they are resolved not to part with

their sins, they find it necessary to part with their faith, in order to preserve any tolerable quiet in the commission of them. But, whatever reason may be assigned for it, these are dreadful examples of the character described in the text. Another instance of this goodness complained of, and condemned, may be observed,

In those persons who have, from kind admonitions and serious reflections, been convinced of the importance and necessity of a religious course, but have yet outlived their convictions, and returned to their former security and sensuality. Many persons, who have not had the advantage of a religious education, or on whom the good instructions of their parents have had no immediate influence, have yet by some other means which God has blessed for that purpose, been brought to consider their ways, and turn their feet to his testimonies. Perhaps their guilt and danger may have been represented in such awful terms, as to rouse their attention, and awaken them to reflect what they have been doing in despising the warnings they have received; blasting the wishes and wounding

wounding the spirits of their sincerest friends, but especially in rebelling against their father in heaven, and doing despite to the spirit of grace. Or possibly a sick bed, the near views of death and an eternal world, which they have made no provision for, have brought them to look back with shame and remorse upon their past lives, and wish for an opportunity to tread back the fatal steps they have taken, and evidence to themselves and the world the sincerity of their repentance. But it is too seldom that the promises and vows that are made on a sick bed are remembered long after a recovery. As the fear of immediate death vanishes, good resolutions are forgotten; and as bodily strength recovers, folly and sin recover strength too: thus they return to their former course with as little concern, as if they imagined they should never be brought to the borders of eternity again: thus their goodness, after all the fair promises they had made, is but as a morning cloud, and as the early dew.

Further; This comparison is a very fit and apt representation of the character and conduct of those persons, who,
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though they do not wholly forsake the service of God, yet are religious only at certain seasons, and upon particular occasions, and at other times act as if they had no regard to God at all. Such as hope, perhaps, by their zeal or devotion one day of the week, to make compensation for the iniquity which they commit on the rest of it: not considering that the most solemn exercises of piety at particular times, are of no use to men, nor can otherwise be acceptable in the sight of God, than as they engage them to the practice of sobriety, righteousness and godliness in the other parts of their lives. This goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away, without leaving any lasting effects behind. So also is that of those, who are religious only by fits; whose devotion, like a sudden flame, burns bright and strong for a time, but soon ceases again, and lies smothered till some accidental blast for a while revives it. We do not speak here of the lesser irregularities of the christian temper and course, which may be consistent with an habitual regard to, and observance of the divine law, but of such interruptions and omissions

as make a total breach in our religion. The best men are not so serious in their spirits, so regular in the performance of their duty, and in the exercise of piety, so watchful against, and victorious over temptations at all times, as they are in the general course of their lives. Still their religion is consistent and uniform, they live under an habitual sense of God, and are properly influenced by the fears and hopes of a future state; though such principles are not always equally strong and active. But the persons included in the description of the text are very devout upon some occasions, but at others are altogether worldly, sensual, and perhaps profane. Men may be thus occasionally good (if it can be called goodness) and yet be habitually wicked and ungodly. The persons referred to in the text were examples of this temporary goodness. When they saw the works of God, his wonderful works of mercy to them, and of judgment on their enemies, they sang his praises, and while a sense of these things was new upon their minds, they remembered their author. So on the other “hand in their afflictions they sought him “early;” they were humbled and penitent

tent so long as the rod hung over their heads, or they felt the severe rebukes of providence for their iniquities. Though such dispensations for the present made some impressions upon them, it did not, however continue, but they soon returned to their former security, ingratitude, and hardness of heart. Herein they have had too many followers in all ages of the world, who can occasionally submit to the duties of religion, but are eager to return back to their sinful practices. The dealings of heaven may for a time awaken them out of their lethargy, but, like the "Israelites they soon forget his works, and wait not for his counsels." Thus their religion hangs upon them like an intermitting fever, that threatens at certain hours, and at others is entirely cold. To-day they appear to be actuated by a warm zeal for the glory of God, and a serious concern for their own eternal interests; seeming afraid to sin, and having a regard to duty and conscience: to-morrow they turn their back on religion, and care for none of these things. Nay, are there not some who go through a perpetual round of sinning and repenting, who make use of
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repentance as an expedient to quit the old arrears of their iniquity, that so they may be at liberty (if we may so speak) to run on a new score with God and conscience? All these instances are but the appearances of goodness, and may be fitly compared as they are in the text. But I proceed

Secondly; To inquire from what cause it arises that the goodness of any is thus temporary and transient; which will shew at the same time the means that are necessary to our steadiness and perseverance in religion. And the general cause of this is undoubtedly the want of a thorough and fixed resolution. Either that men never resolved seriously to be religious; or that their resolution was founded on such reasons and motives as were not sufficient to support it; or else, that they have not applied with diligence to the use of those means which are necessary to strengthen and settle them in the ways of God. What religion such persons have is but like a house built upon the sand, to which our Saviour compares it; and as that cannot stand the shock of stormy and tempestuous weather, so neither will this stand in
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an evil day, or bear up under any pressing temptation. How is it possible, that men should be otherwise than wavering and unsettled in the service of God, if they have never heartily resolved to pursue it, or if this determination has been only the effect of some sudden and momentary affection? Without a solemn deliberate purpose of mind, the power of our own evil habits, and the influence of bad examples, will be too strong for our judgments, and prevail even against our convictions. If then we would be “stedfast and immoveable in the work of the Lord,” let us be sure to lay the foundation of our religion well, deep and strong. Let us consider what religion is, and the path it prescribes to us to walk in, and form our resolutions upon the fullest and most impartial view of the difficulties before us; not on such motives as derive all their force from a particular occasion, or the present temper of our minds; but on such principles and arguments as will hold equally good at all times, and in all conditions: such as these, a sense of the infinite evil of sin, and its offensiveness in the sight of God; the consideration of it, as the
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shame, the reproach, the degeneracy of our reasonable natures, as well as the destruction of our souls; a conviction of the reasonableness and righteousness of all God's commands, and the tendency of obedience to refine and perfect our nature, and prepare us for the happiness for which we are made and designed; a sense of the divine authority over us, and the obligations we are under to the God, that made, that preserves, and has redeemed us; a conviction of the worth of the soul, and the vast moment of religion to our present peace and our eternal happiness; all which are arguments that do not owe their force to a present fit of devotion or passion; but, if seriously considered, are likely to have a powerful and commanding influence at all times and in all conditions.

Let us often review our lives and actions, and enquire whether we have made, and how we have kept our covenant with God; by which we may understand the true state of our minds, be taught to correct what is amiss, and supply what is wanting. He whose affairs are in a flourishing condition will not be afraid to look into his accounts; the neglect

lect of which is not only a proof that a man's circumstances are bad, but has an evident tendency to make them worse. The case is the same in religion; our souls can never prosper without frequent and serious examination into our lives and actions. As we would not therefore have our eternal hopes defeated; as we would not find the want of them at that season when we shall most of all need their support; even when we are called to conflict with the terrors of death, and appear before the tribunal of Christ; let us see to it, that our righteousness exceed that which is described in the text. Let us be always cautious of offending an ever-present God, and careful to do those things which are pleasing to him, that thus we may be accepted of him through his infinite mercy, and the mediation of his son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To all our endeavours let us join frequent prayers to the God of all grace, who alone is able to keep us from falling, that we may be presented faultless before his glory with exceeding joy.

And when once we have this “testimony that we please God, our consciences

“ences bearing us witnesses, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with
“fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of
“God, we have our conversation in the
“world,” this will lay a solid foundation for peace in our own minds, and be a source of such divine and exalted pleasure, as the greatest affluence of worldly good cannot give, as no want, no distress, or adversity can take away. The favour of God will always encompass us as a shield, to defend us against every real evil, and be as a sun to shine upon our steps, to enlighten our minds, and to rejoice our hearts. “For the Lord
“God is both a sun and a shield, he
“will give grace and glory, and no good
“thing will he withhold from them that
“walk uprightly.”

Therefore, my beloved brethren, “be
“ye steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch
“as ye know that your labour shall not
“be in vain in the Lord.”

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